

Exchange Report Koen Oskam

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia September 2016 – December 2016

Preparation

After being selected to go to Moscow and explaining to everyone why, off all places, I was going to Russia, the preparation was a long and frustrating process. The communication with the MSU was quite terrible and they did not provide a lot of information. It also took them roughly two months to get me a visa invitation, which arrived at the end of August. Only after this I could apply for a visa (€110, -) and the sixth of September I was finally able to go to Russia. Besides the visa, there is not a lot to prepare before leaving. The MSU takes care of a place in one of the dormitories and you do not have to worry about courses before arriving at the MSU. I had to choose courses before leaving, but it seemed that the offered courses on the website did not correspond with the courses that were actually offered. I strongly advice to learn at least the Cyrillic alphabet in advance, this will make it a lot simpler to navigate, because a lot of words are directly transliterated. Also make sure to have a taxi (Yandex/Gett/Uber) and a Moscow metro app on your phone. If you want to join a sport team or want to use the swimming pool in the main building, then you will also need a recent health certificate.

Arrival

The MSU could not find anyone to pick me up at the airport, so I had to get to the dormitory on my own. This was surprisingly easy thanks to the aeroexpress and the metro system. The exchange coordinator helped me at the dormitory to make sure that I got a room. The dormitory was a classic communism flat, exactly like you would expect it. The staff consisted out of babushkas, who constantly yell at you in Russian, and guards. None of them spoke English, but some Russian students explained how everything worked in the dormitory. There is a guard at the entrance 24/7 and you also have to show your 'propusk' every time to enter the building. The dormitory was close to the campus, but it still took 30 minutes to get to the economic faculty, which was on the other side of the campus. According to Russian students, we ended up in the worst dormitory of the MSU and they were probably right. If you are lucky you will end up at the dorm in the main building, which is slightly better and (obviously) at the centre of the campus.

I arrived just in time for the first meeting at the MSU, where they explained how the semester was going to look like. Officially, the semester would start at the first of September and would end at the 21th of January. It turned out that the semester would end late December and that it was not yet clear which courses would be offered and when these would start.

Daily life

The only course that was given in the first two weeks was the Russian language course. This was great, because this meant we had lots of free time to explore Moscow. It is the biggest city of Europe, so there is plenty to see and to do. Parks, museums, cathedrals, theatres, football and ice hockey matches and of course the night life. The night life in Moscow is great and there are also international events almost every week. The MSU has an international student club which organises all kinds of events. Russian students rarely go out throughout the week though. It was a bit shocking how bad the Russians are at English, even in the touristic places they barely speak it. Police is walking around everywhere and every shopping mall/metro station/etc. has metal detectors, so you will feel totally safe. Because of the sanctions some kinds of food are not available or more expensive, but this is barely noticeable. It is only nearly impossible to find good cheese. We mostly ate at the

canteen in the faculty, because there were only two kitchens per floor in our dormitory and these were constantly being used by Chinese students. At the end of October, the first snow already came down and the Russian winter began. The coldest temperature I experienced was minus 25 °C, so be prepared.

Apart from Moscow I also visited Saint Petersburg and Kiev

Saint Petersburg is a totally different city from Moscow and has a much more European feeling. The Russian students said that it feels like you are walking around in an open-air museum when you are in the city and I completely agree with this. In contradiction to Moscow, the centre is also no communist architecture in the centre of the city. The city is much more orientated to western tourist than Moscow, so it is easier to find English speaking Russians. For only €40, - it is possible to go there from Moscow and back, by either train or plane.

Kiev was the capital of the Kievan Rus empire and therefore one of the most important cities in Russian history, even though it is not a Russian city. It has a lot of similarities with Moscow and Saint Petersburg, but it is still an unique and wonderful city. There are no flights between Ukraine and Russia because of the current problems between the countries, so I had to take a train that took 13 hours and costed around €100, -. Most of the people use Russian in daily life, although all the street signs/info are in Ukrainian. The city is unbelievably cheap, I would not be surprised if Kiev is the cheapest capital in Europe. I also took a tour to Chernobyl and this was an amazing and very special experience. It is totally safe and I can definitely recommend it.

Finances

I wrote down all the prices in roubles, because the euro/rouble exchange rate changed a lot over time. In the beginning, a euro was worth 75 roubles and in the end I got 62 roubles for a euro. Life in Russia got more expensive every week for me.

Monthly expenses	
Rent dormitory	6000 RUB
Public transport	2000 RUB
Mobile	600 RUB
Food	15000 RUB
Internet dormitory	400 RUB
Free time/ Going out	20000 RUB
Total	44000 RUB

Courses

Special Economic Zones and Offshore territories – 5 ECTS

This first part of this course was about special economic zones that countries around the world use to stimulate their economies. The second part was about tax systems in tax friendly countries (including the Netherlands) and how these systems are used by companies to avoid taxes. It could have been interesting, but unfortunately the course was poorly given. The professor obviously did not put a lot of effort in the course and was just reading bullet points from his PowerPoint every lecture. Everyone had to give a presentation about the tax system in their home countries and there also was a quite difficult exam.

Technical Analysis – 5 ECTS

This course was an introduction to currency trading. We used a computer programme (of which I forgot the name) used for trading, to learn the basics and which kind of patterns there are with exchange rates. We also did some trading ourselves, but not with real money of course. The exam was very simple and everyone easily passed the course.

International Financial Accounting and Reporting – 5 ECTS

I did not pass Intermediate Accounting at the Erasmus, so I thought it would be a good idea to do a comparable course at the MSU. Unfortunately, I discovered that cannot motivate myself for accounting. The course itself was good and if you scored enough points for the homework, you did not have to do the exam to pass the course.

Russian Language course – 10 ECTS

This course was supposed to be worth 15 ECTS, but somehow I only ended up with 10 ECTS. I took this course so I would be able to communicate a bit in Russian. The course turned out to be a lot more serious than expected, with 12 contact hours a week. The biggest surprise was that our teacher did not speak English. She did speak German though and there were a lot of German students, so this was not a big issue. At the end of the course I could have a basic conversation with my teacher, but outside of the classroom it was not of that much help. We had an exam which contained a listening, grammar, reading and speaking part, but even the students who did not turn up got all their ECTS.

Conclusion

It was a great experience to study abroad in Russia and to see one of the biggest cities in the world. In the beginning it might be a culture shock, but after the first days this will be over. It is great to get in contact with a different culture and to see it by yourself. I am not very positive about the Moscow State University, because of the poor organisation and communication. The Higher School of Economics is also a partner university of the ESE and I advise you to choose that one instead.

Main Building:



Faculty of Economics:

