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### **Being an Erasmus Student**

Most students in Turkey are frightened of the Erasmus Student Exchange Program as it requires one to stay in a completely foreign country for months at least. Taking into account the fact that most Turkish students are not raised in a way that would enable them to take a blind leap of faith. Indeed, the coordinators in your home university can guide you through the procedures, give advice and try to prepare you for this experience, but there's no guarantee that you will be able to make friends, or be welcomed warmly by the teachers and officials in the country you visit. In that respect, being an Erasmus student is much like taking a leap. However, it is in your hands to determine whether it will be a leap forward, or not.

One of the most important things when visiting a foreign country is your attitude in general. It is not only certain rules of behaviour that I talk about, but also the way you react to things that are unfamiliar. This unfamiliar thing may be a thought, a figure of speech, a tradition, or even a dish. The important thing is to remember that since you are visiting a foreign country, it is only natural for culture, the atmosphere and the people to be different as well, so comparing the country you visit with your homeland will only end up in disappointment. To be accepting of, or at least tolerating these differences will help you correct false notions about Turks, make your Erasmus experience more pleasant, and people more eager to listen to you talk about Turkey.

The second thing I believe needs to be remembered is that even though your studies are as important as ever, an Erasmus student also needs to make time to get to know the culture of the country s/he visits. Erasmus student exchange program aims to create mutual knowledge, respect, trust and therefore peace among individuals. This can only be possible by making an effort to understand others and their culture first. It is essential for being able to pinpoint the differences as well.

The differences between Hacettepe University and University of Tampere that I observed during my stay were mostly based on the differences on the budgets. Although UTA does not have a large campus to itself like Hacettepe, the equipment used there and the

buildings are all new and in working order. There are various classrooms which enable the lecturers to divide the teaching into one hour of lecturing with all the students, and two hours of tutorial with smaller groups carried out by different lecturers. It also lessens the workload of the lecturers. I also observed that here in Hacettepe we use more classic methods in analysing a text such as looking for themes and symbols. These are not disregarded in UTA, but they are not the first things that the students instinctively look for. Since the assigned works are analysed mainly in tutorial groups, the discussions are led by lecturers and carried out by students and a work is

Although many people think of Finland as a country where Turks would not be welcome, I never got the same impression. I was assigned a tutor, as is the procedure, and she, along with everyone else was very helpful. The lecturers were very helpful and understanding. I was treated like one of the Finnish students and no comments meant to hurt or ridicule were made about my nationality or religion. On the contrary most were open-minded and tried to understand my culture instead of ostracising me for being different.

I believe I was received well in Finland because I tried to expel my own prejudices before worrying about theirs. Going to a foreign country with the belief that you will be shunned because of your culture or religion, is actually guaranteeing the said outcome with your own hands. I've learned during my Erasmus experience, among other things, that people being more positive and eager to try and understand you and where you come from once they see you making an effort to do the same.

When I first heard about Erasmus program, I knew that I should at least try to take part in it, and looking back all the things that I've learned, seen, all the people I've met, remembering them telling me that they "used to have such a different image of Turkey and Turks but now it's changed", I understand once again that it was one of the best decisions of my life, not because it will look good on my cv, but because of all that I've gained.

My advice to all the soon-to-be-Erasmus-students is that once you have a positive attitude, discuss and make valid points instead of arguing, offending and being offended, you have nothing else to lose, and a lot to gain.