

# Erasmus+ Student Report: Tromsø Spring 2019

- Author: Verena Blaschke
- Study programme: Computational linguistics (M.A.)
- Exchange period: Spring 2019 (08/01/2019–14/06/2019)
- Host university: Universitetet i Tromsø – Norges arktiske universitet (UiT), Norway
- Home university/institute: Universität Tübingen, Seminar für Sprachwissenschaft (SfS)

## 1 Preparation

The application at the linguistics institute in Tübingen was very simple: I just needed to fill out a form and submit a letter of motivation. I did this in July 2018. During the application process, I finished my B.A. studies, but I continued at the same institute as an M.A. student. Applying for an Erasmus semester before actually starting my M.A. studies was not a problem.

After being nominated as an exchange student by my home university, I needed to apply at UiT in September 2018. The necessary documents for the application included an English translation of the transcript of records (make sure you get this early, as it can take some time for the examination office to confirm your translation!) and a first version of the Learning Agreement (LA). UiT's course list for spring 2019 (necessary for filling out the LA) was already available, although some courses and scheduling details were still missing. (However, changing the LA during the beginning of my exchange semester because of a scheduling conflict proved to be very easy.) I also applied for student housing with Norges arktiske studentsamskipnad in September and received a contract in mid-October. I received the letter of acceptance from UiT in early November.

In early November, the international office in Tübingen organized an information session on further administrative steps that needed to be taken before, during and after the exchange, such as applying for the Erasmus+ scholarship and performing a language test.

## 2 Arrival

I arrived in Tromsø by plane on one of two designated arrival days for international students. I had signed up for the key service and was able to pick up my student housing keys directly at the airport.

A few students arrived after a longer journey by car or by train and bus.



Ørndalen student housing in April

### 3 Accommodation

I only applied for student housing and did not look into other options. Based on my own experience and what I have heard from other students, you have very good chances of getting a dorm room during the spring semester (and there were a good number of empty rooms, making it relatively easy to switch student housing if necessary), while the demand is much higher during the fall semester. The university has temporary accommodations for students who are waiting to get into proper housing.

While applying for student housing, I could pick ten dorms and arrange them by preference. I chose Ørndalen as my first pick and was offered a contract for it. It is one of the cheapest dorms (3900 NOK/month). You live in your own room, share a bathroom with up to two other students and a kitchen with up to five others. The student population in Ørndalen tends to be a mix of Norwegian and international students. Once or twice a month, all Ørndalen residents were invited to a joint waffle or taco evening, which was a nice opportunity for getting to know more residents there.

Ørndalen is located in the north-east of the island of Tromsø, about 3.5 km from UiT and 6.5 km from downtown Tromsø. There is a supermarket nearby however, and Ørndalen has a very good bus connection to university, the town centre, a shopping mall and the airport. This student housing is located next to a wooded area that is perfect for going for a walk or cross-country skiing.

Generally, no matter in which student accommodation you live, you need to buy (or bring) your own bedding. It is however worth checking your dorm's storage rooms to see if previous tenants left their bedding behind for new residents. According to most student housing descriptions, you also need to bring your own kitchen equipment, but almost all kitchens already contain enough equipment that previous residents left behind.

I did not use Facebook prior to coming to Tromsø, but I ended up setting up an account very quickly. I recommend joining the groups for international students at UiT and for your student housing early on.

## 4 Studies

Most courses at UiT are worth 10 ECTS points. UiT does *not* offer a computational linguistics programme, but they do offer linguistics, computer science and statistics programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels, and in English and Norwegian. The university also offers Norwegian language classes (A1, A2, B1), but they do not yield any ECTS points.

I took one (English-language) M.A.-level 10 ECTS linguistics seminar and one (Norwegian-language) B.A.-level 10-ECTS class, both of which were recognized as 9-CP Hauptseminar courses in Tübingen. Additionally, I took a Norwegian class (B1, 6 hrs/week), which was not recognized. The atmosphere at university was very friendly, without a lot of social distance between students and lecturers/researchers.

The M.A.-level course consisted of lectures, a mid-term project and a term paper. The B.A.-level class consisted of lectures, written assignments and a take-home exam. Since the latter course was a class on Norwegian dialects, we went on a two-day field trip to a region near Tromsø to explore the dialects spoken there. If you are interested in dialectology and already speak some Norwegian, I highly recommend taking this class (NOR-1022).

## 5 Life in Tromsø

I arrived in Tromsø in early January, during the polar night. We did not get any direct sunlight until late January, but even before that the twilight around noon was brighter than I had previously assumed. I arrived at the beginning of a welcome week for international students, and fortunately, it was easy to keep busy enough to not be bothered much by the darkness outside (meeting people, going cross-country skiing in/around Tromsø, watching the polar lights, etc.). From mid-May to late July, the sun does not set at all. This does make falling asleep and keeping a consistent sleep pattern a bit harder, but I enjoyed the bright evenings/nights and how comfortable spending time outside no matter the time of day was. The temperatures in Tromsø are very temperate—around  $-10$ – $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  during winter and  $8$ – $15^{\circ}\text{C}$  during summer.

I made some very good (Norwegian and international) friends in Tromsø. I got to know other students through events organized for international students, language cafés (Multi-Språkkafé, (Norsk-)Tysk Språkkafé), other cultural events (communal cooking at Folkekjøkken), and especially while volunteering at a student café on campus (Café Bodega).



Tromsø in the early afternoon in January

The only downside to studying in Norway is that a lot of things tend to be very expensive compared to living in Germany, especially groceries and going out to cafés or bars. The events listed above are free however, and for other free recreational offers, I recommend checking out Turbo (outdoor equipment) and Tvibit (visual arts and music).

During my time in Tromsø, I also had the possibility to explore the landscape surrounding the town while skiing or hiking, and to see more of Northern Norway by travelling by boat (Hurtigruten), bus or rental car.

## 6 Conclusion

I fully recommend picking Tromsø as exchange destination. If you have any questions about my semester there, feel free to contact me!