

Dear reader,

my name is Linda and you successfully found your way to my experience report about my ERASMUS semester at the Vilnius University in Lithuania. Welcome and congratulations, because you chose a beautiful country with a long and interesting history and a culture that was shaped by significant events in the past, national pride and an incredible friendly culture.

Preparation - My way to Lithuania

Why Lithuania? It is a tiny country with about 2,8 million inhabitants. Vilnius itself rather feels like small town than a capital city. With its 580.000 people, narrow streets and a character that reminds us to the former east Germany, it became a place I now call home, very fast.

Before going to Lithuania, you have to be aware of a few things. Visiting the country in winter can be more than challenging. Temperatures can reach lows of -20°C. A good winter jacket and some warm shoes are necessary. Summer and spring can be warm and temperatures might reach 30°C. In any season, a strong wind might change the weather fast and lower degrees feel even colder. Often, spring and fall are more than just wet. Pouring rain can last for days - an umbrella and rain jacket should be part of your luggage.



Abb. 1: The river Neris

Since Lithuania is part of the European Union and joined the Euro Zone just a few years ago, a visa is not needed for European students and money does not need to be changed. In most cases, credit cards are accepted, but having cash can be useful when paying a taxi driver and buying food on a local market. For Germans with a German bank account, withdrawing money from an ATM can have a fee up to 5 €. There are possibilities to link a bank account to an international account, which acts as a third party between and the fees can be saved.

With an international (European) insurance card, the basic insurance is covered. This card is standard in Germany. However, in case of an emergency, this insurance won't be enough and I would recommend adding a travel insurance, which is offered by most insurance companies.

Before the semester starts, an introduction week offers all needed preparation for the semester. I would recommend attending this week, not only because of all the useful information you'll get, but especially because of the social contacts you'll have after just one day. Most events during these days are held by the international office and its team, but also by the local ESN team. The ESN team has often local students as members who organize different international events throughout the semester. Trips to other cities, sportive activities, international nights and more are perfect opportunities to get to know other ERASMUS students and to find friends.



Abb. 2: Trakai - a city close to Vilnius

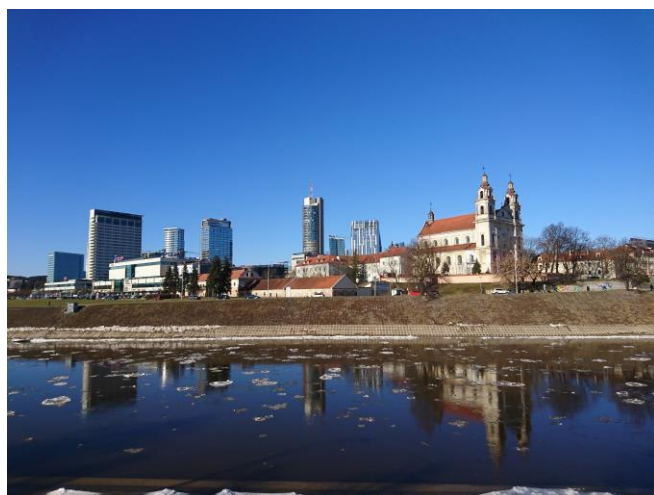
The Buddy-Program is organized by the ESN team as well. Having a buddy, often a local (Lithuanian) student, can be a great advantage when getting to know Vilnius and its university. The Lithuanian international office will send an email beforehand and will ask you whether you'd like to have a buddy or not. Especially when applying for the LSP-Card (Lithuanian student card), a local student is very useful, because you'll need a local mobile-phone number and a lot of information on the LSP-website is written in a mix of Lithuanian and English language. The LSP-card is very important, because it acts as identification, you can put your monthly bus ticket on it and you'll need it for borrowing books from the library. Often the ISIC card is sufficient, but you won't be able to enter the old library downtown or to borrow a book from any of the libraries. The application process is online and linked to your university. When arriving in Vilnius, the card has to be picked up at a bank or another institution you have to choose before.

A bus ticket for a single ride costs 50 ct for students and 1 € for non-students. With LSP, the monthly student ticket costs 5,80 € and can be used all over Vilnius. Bus and train tickets to other cities often don't exceed 3,00 €, because students get a 50% discount in every public transportation system. With either LSP or ISIC, you as a student can get a discount in cafés, stores, museums and many other places. Never lose your student card - it is one of your most valuable items there.

Accommodation - How to find a place to stay in Vilnius

Finding a place in Vilnius can be tricky. I found my room in a shared apartment via erasmusu.com. Other people used AirBnB to have an apartment for the first few days and started looking for a different place after arriving in Vilnius. Another popular way is Facebook (of course!). Different groups are solely aimed to find a home in the city. The groups are often private, but your buddy (or a personal message) can help to get in. Apartments in Vilnius should never cost more than 400€. If somebody requests more, you probably get tricked.

The easiest way to stay in Vilnius is having a room in the dorm. Unfortunately, the Lithuanian dorms are far from German standards. Generally, rooms are shared by 2 or 3 people. The facilities are in bad conditions, rooms are narrow and kitchens are dirty. Biggest advantage: a dorm room costs between 40 and 80 € per month. You sleep like a stone, you don't need much privacy and space and you like adventures? Take a dorm room! But if you need your quiet time and you usually study and eat at home, I would recommend looking for a private accommodation.



Studies - A normal day at university

Getting around the city is easy. Busses run frequently, multiple lines can bring you to the university from anywhere in the city. The monthly bus ticket can be bought at little kiosks like *Narvesen*. As soon as you have your ticket, you need to activate it in the bus and

your 30 days will start. Once activated, you won't need to do anything with this ticket until it expires and you have to put a new one on your card. Three-month tickets are available as well. The app *trafi* shows you all busses, routes, times and even has the option to let you add a bus ticket on your phone as well, although I haven't used this option and I can't say, whether it works as easy as the student card version or not.



Abb. 3: Vilnius from the top (TV Tower)

No bus available? Take a taxi! Taxis can be called via multiple apps. Uber, Taxify, E-Taksi... to just mention a few. Calling a taxi via app is definitely cheaper than just stopping one that is driving by. I personally always used Taxify and I can say, I was completely satisfied. Easy to handle.



In general, the mobile data reception is one of the best of all countries in Europe. I usually had a LTE reception, simply using my German phone number. If you use your own phone number and mobile data, it can happen that at some point in time your provider will send you a note that you have to reduce your actions, because you've been using it for too long. It did not happen to me, but I've heard it from other

students. A Lithuanian SIM-Card was provided by the university with 6 GB for less than 7 €.

Now, after you've reached the university, using whatever kind of transportation, you'll either find yourself within the old town or, and most often, a little outside the city. The campus at Sauletekis (20 minutes from downtown) is also the home of most of the dorms (another advantage of a dorm room). An amazing new library invites students to stay there 24/7. Meals and coffee are provided, backpacks can be taken inside. The Faculty of Economics and the Business School have own canteens, the food is simple but good.



Abb. 4: The library at Sauletekis

At Vilnius University, I was able to choose courses from both, the Business School and the Faculty of Economics. In the beginning, I had five courses on my learning agreement. Two of them were exactly the same and another one I exchanged it for one I discovered when I visited the lecture. In the end, I had four courses: Business Operations Management, Strategic Management, International Economics and Business Ethics and Social Responsibility. With four courses, I was able to keep myself busy, but my free time did not suffer from it. Some teachers had an excellent English language and pronunciation, others not. But all in all: the courses were all understandable, sometimes a little unorganized and not too hard. My personal favourite course was Business Ethics. It gave a different view on the corporate world out there and I personally enjoyed it very much.

The Lithuanian teaching style is different from the one you know. A grade is worth 100%, but you'll collect different percentages during the semester in many different ways. Many teachers give a participation and attendance mark, but often only 10% out of 100%. Some others require a higher percentage. To get the highest grade, a 10, you'll need to prepare presentations, group works, term papers or sometimes

even a video. The lowest grade to still pass the exam is a 5 (our 4,0). Mid-term and final exams are required.

The courses often reminded me to former classes at high school. The classes and even the rooms were often quite small. With less than 30 people, the courses were still very international. Big Italian, French and German groups shaped the ERASMUS communities, but people came from all other parts of the world as well. For example: Austria, USA, Canada, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, China, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain etc.

Free time

Again, taking part at the ESN events organized by the ESN team are a good opportunity to find friends and to spend your time. Unfortunately, most activities are organized via Facebook. If you don't have it, try to find a friend who'll keep you updated. Many museums with student discounts cover the city. Since Lithuania has a very interesting and dramatic history, these places are worth a visit.

Two or three clubs are very popular within the ERASMUS community (Cocain, Salento etc.) I've never seen any of them from the inside, because I don't like crowded places, but I've got told that they are usually very international and fun (a little alcohol before is probably needed). On the other hand, the bar and pub culture in Vilnius is big as well. I won't recommend any special restaurant, because all of them serve amazingly good food. The Lithuanian cuisine itself is a little heavy, potato and meat based, but still tasty.

Vilnius in spring is a green and vibrant city. In winter, the Lithuanians seem a little grumpy on the first side. But the people there are usually friendly, open minded and help wherever they can.



Abb. 5: Museum of Illusions

Conclusion

The city of Vilnius, in my opinion, is most beautiful during spring and summer. Many hiking trails cover and surround the city, tourist attractions are worth visiting. Studying is fun and I have to say: I met a lot of amazing people and I would guess, a hand full of them will stay a lifetime. Choosing Lithuania as your destination is not a stereotype ERASMUS decision, but still worth it. It will take some time to get to know the culture and habits of the locals, but in the end, you won't regret it.