

ERASMUS+: University of Bergen (Autumn Semester 2024)

I spent my 5th semester of my bachelor's in marine geosciences at the University of Bergen, Norway. I chose Norway because it has always been a dream of mine to live there, and I was really happy to take the opportunity of studying there.

Preparation

I received a positive response to my initial application through Erasmus via Mobility Online in early March. After accepting the offer, it took about a week to gain access to the University of Bergen's online application portal, Søknadsweb, where course registration and other formalities are completed. UiB has a very detailed "checklist", that you can follow for your application. I found it very useful and got all the information I needed through there and the mails they sent in the preparation process. (<https://www.uib.no/en/education/48741/admission-exchange-students>)

Formalities in Norway

For stays exceeding three months in Norway, it is necessary to register with the police. This appointment can also be used for getting a Norwegian bank account (only needed if you plan on working in Norway). During my time in Bergen, there was a miscommunication between the university and the police. The university informed us that appointments had been pre-booked for international students, but this turned out not to be the case. As a result, the queues were quite long, and almost all students were turned away. In response to the situation, the police made an exception for EU/EFTA students staying less than six months, waiving the registration requirement. As far as I know, this still applies. However, this policy may change in the future, so it is advisable to check the website (<https://www.uib.no/en/student/89443/register-police>).

General Information About UiB

Outside of class, UiB offers a wide variety of social activities. The Welcome Week, held the week before the start of lectures, is quite big in Bergen and was a great opportunity to meet other students. During the autumn semester of 2024, the University of Bergen hosted over 1,000 international students. That is why there were separate programmes for internationals and Norwegians. During the welcome week you get split up into groups of around 20 (first based on faculty + then on study programme) and get assigned "buddies/fadders". They make sure that you have everything you need for the events and are also hosting pre-parties etc.

Generally, the university supports a thriving student life with opportunities for sports and trips. Uni Sport provides a broad range of activities (Volleyball, Rugby, Handball, Swimming, Rowing, and MANY more), and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) organizes trips to locations like Tromsø, Lofoten, and Finnish Lapland. Additionally, organizations like BSI Friluft offer guided outdoor trips, such as hikes, cross-country skiing, and cabin stays. As a member, you can also rent hiking equipment (tents, sleeping mats, etc.). For those looking for social engagement, groups like Skeive Studenter Bergen (queer student group) and TU Fantoft (tenants' unit at the largest student accommodation in Bergen) host events ranging from quizzes and board games to parties and beer pong tournaments. Bergen's location also makes it an excellent base for exploring surrounding areas, including Stavanger, Trondheim, Oslo, and Hardangervidda National Park.

Courses (Selection and Offers)

UiB provides a broad range of courses for international students, particularly in the natural sciences. The autumn semester course list is typically published in early March, although the courses (mostly) do not really change compared to the year before, so you can check out options already before you even think about applying.

Courses in the Science and Technology faculty are always restricted (which means that you have to apply and your application has to be checked), with some requiring specific previous knowledge. The application process for courses is straightforward (very well guided on the UiB webpage: <https://www.uib.no/en/education/96061/how-apply-exchange>, but there are some challenges to consider. The schedules for courses are only released after registration, which can result in schedule conflicts. If that is the case, you cannot change the courses on your own (because all courses from the science faculty are restricted!!). The change of courses (=application for other courses than in the initial application) happens in the beginning of the semester about **a week BEFORE** lectures start.

In my case there were some schedule conflicts, but everything turned out well in the end and I got admitted to the courses I wanted. This process of looking for courses that suit your interest, then checking if they fit in the timetable and then hoping that there is still space left was quite stressful! The rule is that you have a guaranteed spot in the courses you have initially applied (and got approved) for, but **NOT** for the courses you apply for in the second round (due to schedule conflicts etc.). This means you could get denied because there are already too many students in the class. This is why I recommend you to apply for **ALL** the courses you **consider** (application in Søknadsweb). When you get admission during this process, you have a secured spot in the class and can choose later which courses fit in your schedule. This should save you a lot of stress and uncertainty. But the support during this process is really good (!!), so if you have any questions, you can write emails to the faculty or ask in person during the informational meetings in the beginning.

The time spent attending lectures and seminars at UiB is comparable to my study programme at the Uni in Bremen. However, the teaching methods are often different. Lectures at UiB frequently adopt a more interactive approach, focusing on active participation and applying the flipped classroom model. In two out of the three courses I attended this format was used, where they tried to encourage engagement and a deeper understanding of the material. This needed a bit of getting used to and a lot more preparation, compared to normal lectures. It turned out to be kind of a “love-hate” relationship.

During my semester I took part in 3 courses of 10 credit points each:

GEOV222 Paleoclimatology (<https://www4.uib.no/en/courses/geov222>) consisted of lectures, exercises, and seminars, with assessments split between exercises and participation (40%) and a written exam (60%). This was my favourite course. For me it was a perfect mixture of geology and climate sciences, and the way of teaching really encouraged me to learn a lot.

GEOV217 Geohazards (<https://www4.uib.no/en/courses/geov217>) consisted of 2 classes per week with the flipped classroom principle. This meant a lot of preparation beforehand. The topics were mostly quite interesting, and I could learn a lot in the course. But the amount of work you needed to put into it, still makes me question if it was “worth it”. Its assessment included weekly quizzes, reflection diary (not graded), group poster work, a term paper, and a group risk communication project. Part of the course was also an excursion to the “countryside” of Norway. We stopped at multiple locations (current hazards, old landslide and avalanche tracks, mitigation measures in progress, etc.) to visualise things learned in class. Even though it was only 2 days, I really enjoyed it, since you could learn a lot about the country, and we saw a lot while driving to different locations.

SDG213 Causes and Consequences of Climate Change (<https://www4.uib.no/en/courses/sdg213>) involved a group video project (30%) and a semester thesis (70%) with one lecture and one colloquium (group work often with presentation afterwards) per week. From this course I expected a bit more. It sadly did not go all too much into the depths and science of climate, but was more broad.

In all of the courses there was more or less mandatory attendance, which sometimes was a bit annoying, since I had classes every day of the week. Generally, the climate is very friendly at the University of Bergen. Surnames and titles are not a thing and in Geohazards and Climate

Change, we were also taught by PhDs (acting as teachers assistants in the course). The courses I took were for both master and bachelor level, sometimes there were even PhDs. Students are also from various backgrounds (geology, biology, physics) which made the classes quite diverse.

Accommodation

I stayed at Fantoft, the largest student housing complex, which primarily accommodates international exchange students. The University of Bergen guarantees housing for exchange students who apply **by the deadline (in autumn 24: 10th May)** through the SAMMEN portal. The housing options range from single rooms to shared flats and shared rooms. Important to note is that due to capacity limitations, students staying for only one semester will stay in shared rooms. You can of course also apply for other options (you can select your 3 favorite accommodations in the application process) but they mention that a room at fantoft (shared room) can always be assigned for international students.

Fantoft is located about 15 minutes from the science building and 20 minutes from the city center by tram (Bybanen). Although I stayed in a shared room with limited privacy, the general environment was very nice to live in. Many friends from university lived there, and many things weren't far: grocery store, gym, place to swim, hiking, etc. The tenants unit also organized a lot of things and you had the possibility to rent all sorts of things from them (hiking equipment, vacuum cleaners, etc.).

Additional Information

The Norwegian academic calendar differs from the German one. The autumn semester runs from August to December, which may require adjustments, especially since you need to leave for Norway already about 2 weeks after the last exams in Bremen.

Bergen itself is surrounded by a lot of nature, which I really enjoyed during my time there. It is surrounded by 7 mountains and you can take part in the official Seven Mountain Hike (~37km) taking pace in May, or just do it on your own. Norway's right to roam allows great access to nature, which you should definitely take advantage of.

There is no semester ticket in Bergen, you need to purchase seasonal tickets on your own. Price wise it is comparable to the semester ticket in Bremen. The main transportation is definitely the "Bybanen" (tram), but there are a lot of busses and even ferries.

After My Return

I am unable to provide detailed information about the recognition process, as it is still ongoing. However, obtaining the transcript of records from UiB is relatively simple. I recommend requesting it as soon as all course results are available to avoid your account being deleted before you can get them.

Conclusion

My semester abroad in Bergen was an unforgettable experience. It offered both academic and personal growth, and I would not have wanted to miss it. The support both on the Norwegian site as well as at my home university from my Erasmus coordinator and the international office was really great and I was never left in doubt. I highly recommend studying abroad and the University of Bergen was both academically as well as socially a really great choice.