

Student report on the exchange

Report written based on students' impressions in a joint effort upon returning from Istanbul

1 Most memorable events

We recently participated in an Erasmus exchange program in Istanbul, and it was an experience we will not soon forget. Our trip was filled with memorable moments, cultural exchanges, and new friendships. Here are some highlights of our journey.



One of the most unforgettable experiences was tasting the local cuisine. The variety and richness of Turkish food left a lasting impression on us. Many of us enjoyed the sweet delicacy of baklava, which was a true treat for the senses. Cheesecake in Istanbul was also mentioned as a divine experience, and the Turkish coffee was unlike anything we had tasted before.

Another highlight was the time we spent exploring the city's famous bazaars. The Grand Bazaar and Spice Bazaar were vibrant and bustling with life. The art of bargaining was both challenging and exciting, and we loved immersing ourselves in the local culture. The bazaars were a feast for the eyes and offered a unique insight into Turkish commerce and daily life.

We also had the opportunity to experience the city's transportation system, including bus rides and boat tours. The bus rides were an adventure on their own, with the chaotic traffic adding a thrill to our daily commutes. However, it was the boat tour across the Bosphorus that truly stood out. It was a peaceful and scenic way to view the city from the water, and it provided us with a unique perspective of Istanbul's beauty.

Our time at the partner school was another significant part of our exchange. We participated in various activities, culminating in a football match between the Austrian and Turkish students. Although we lost the game 3:4, the spirit of sportsmanship and the joy of playing together made it a memorable event. The farewell dinner and the certificate ceremony were also special moments that marked the end of our stay and celebrated our achievements.

The social aspect of the exchange was equally important. We spent time hanging out with our Turkish peers, learning about their way of life, and sharing our own experiences. The welcome dinner at the





restaurant Köroglu was a wonderful opportunity to bond and set the tone for the rest of the exchange.

Overall, our Erasmus exchange in Istanbul was a rich tapestry of cultural experiences, personal growth, and lasting memories. We returned home with a deeper understanding of Turkish culture and a sense of accomplishment for having navigated and embraced a new environment. This journey has not only expanded our horizons but also forged new friendships that will endure beyond the duration of the exchange.

2 Collaboration with Host Students

The collaboration with our host students in Istanbul was an essential part of our exchange experience. Overall, the cooperation worked very well and significantly enriched our stay.

Many of us found the host students to be extremely friendly and welcoming. They went out of their way to make us feel comfortable and were always ready to help. Their openness and hospitality made it easy for us to connect with them and build a good rapport.

Communication, however, was not always smooth. While many of our hosts spoke English, there were instances where language barriers posed a challenge. Some of us pointed out that some students struggled with English, making communication difficult at times. Despite occasional difficulties in understanding each other, we always managed to find a solution and work things out. Even though it was sometimes hard to communicate in English, everyone was very kind and hospitable.

Despite these challenges, the Turkish students were incredibly helpful and played a crucial role in our experience. Their assistance was invaluable, and without them, we would have faced more difficulties. Their openness and hospitality were notable, as they not only showed us the best sights and restaurants but also helped us navigate the bazaars, ensuring we got fair deals.

We also had many opportunities to engage in activities together, which strengthened our bond. The collaboration was very good, and we enjoyed various activities with our hosts. Playing football and spending evenings together at the hotel were particularly fun and memorable experiences.

At the beginning, there were some moments of awkwardness as we got to know our buddies. However, once we established who our partners were, the collaboration became smooth and enjoyable. We often helped each other translate words between Turkish and German, which facilitated better communication and understanding.

In conclusion, despite some initial communication hurdles, the collaboration with our host students was a great success. Their friendliness, hospitality, and willingness to assist made our stay in Istanbul both enjoyable and educational. This exchange allowed us to form meaningful connections and provided us with a deeper understanding of Turkish culture and hospitality.



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3 Lessons Learned and New Experiences

Our Erasmus week in Istanbul was not only filled with fun and adventure but also with valuable lessons and new experiences. We each took away something different, broadening our horizons and deepening our understanding of the world.

One of the most significant lessons we learned was about the Turkish culture and language. Many of us picked up Turkish words and phrases, which enhanced our ability to communicate and connect with the locals. Experiencing Turkish customs and traditions firsthand was eye-opening and educational.

The affordability of life in Turkey was another surprising discovery for many of us. We realized how much cheaper goods and services are compared to Austria. This insight into the economic differences between our countries gave us a new perspective on the cost of living and value of money.

Improving our English skills was also a major takeaway from this trip. Engaging in conversations with our hosts and navigating through daily activities in English boosted our confidence and proficiency. This experience highlighted the importance of practicing English more frequently in our daily lives.

We also gained a deeper appreciation for our own country. Witnessing the differences in infrastructure, regulations, and overall lifestyle made us more aware of the privileges we often take for granted in Austria. It was a humbling experience that made us more grateful for what we have.

The importance of traffic rules and safety was another lesson learned. Navigating through the bustling streets of Istanbul, we had to be extra cautious, especially when crossing streets or walking in pedestrian zones. This experience underscored the importance of adhering to traffic regulations and being vigilant.

Understanding the religious and cultural practices in Turkey was a profound experience. We observed how seriously some people take their religion, such as women wearing headscarves and the significance of visiting mosques. These observations deepened our respect for different cultural and religious practices.

Visiting historical sites like the Grand Bazaar, which has been around since the 1460s, and learning about the rich history of these places was fascinating. These experiences brought history to life and provided us with a tangible connection to the past.

In summary, our Erasmus week in Istanbul was a rich tapestry of learning and new experiences. From cultural insights and language skills to appreciating our own country more, we returned home with a wealth of knowledge and a broadened perspective. This exchange has not only enriched our education but also our personal growth, leaving us with memories and lessons that will last a lifetime.

4 Favorite Activities of the Week

During our Erasmus week in Istanbul, we participated in a variety of activities that left lasting impressions on all of us. Here are some of the highlights and why they stood out:



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Spending time with our buddies was a highlight for many. The friendships we formed and the time we spent together were invaluable. Whether we were exploring the city or just hanging out, these moments were special because they allowed us to bond and learn from each other.

Visiting the mosques was a profound experience. Seeing the Blue Mosque and other mosques gave us a deep appreciation for the religious practices in Turkey. Observing how often people pray and the importance of these religious sites in their daily lives was eye-opening and made us reflect on our own cultural and religious backgrounds.

The boat tour on the Bosphorus was another favorite activity. The beautiful views and the unique opportunity to cross from the European side to the Asian side of Istanbul made this experience memorable. It was a peaceful and scenic way to see the city from a different perspective.



Exploring the bazaars, particularly the Spice Bazaar and the Grand Bazaar, was a highlight for many of us. The vibrant atmosphere, the variety of goods, and the chance to taste different sweets and snacks for free made these visits exciting. The bustling activity and the chance to practice our bargaining skills added to the fun.

Some of us enjoyed simple pleasures like going out to eat and trying local restaurants. The first dinner with our host students was especially memorable, providing us with a warm welcome and delicious food. These meals were not just about eating but also about sharing experiences and stories with our new friends.

Visiting a local barber was a unique and memorable experience for a few of us. The difference in how barbershops operate in Turkey compared to back home was fascinating. It was a cultural experience that gave us insight into everyday life in Istanbul.



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Overall, the combination of cultural activities, sightseeing, and spending time with our host students made this week unforgettable. Each activity, whether big or small, contributed to a richer understanding of Turkish culture and a deeper connection with the people we met.

5 Observations and Differences in the Partner School

Our visit to the partner school in Istanbul provided us with valuable insights into the educational system and cultural differences between Turkey and Austria. Here are some of the key observations and differences we noticed:

One of the most striking differences was the hospitality of the people. The students and staff at the Turkish school were incredibly welcoming and made us feel at home. Their friendliness and openness were appreciated by all of us.

The school schedule in Turkey was different from what we are used to in Austria. They have eight periods every day, which is more than the average school day in Austria. This longer school day was an interesting contrast to our typical schedule. The overall appearance and condition of the schools were quite different. Many of us noticed that the Turkish schools appeared older and less modern compared to those in Austria. Some facilities, especially the toilets, were not as clean or well-maintained. The infrastructure in general seemed more outdated.

Despite the differences in facilities, the Turkish students seemed happier and more relaxed. It appeared that they had more free time and enjoyed a different approach to their school life. This positive attitude towards school life was something that stood out to us.

Another notable difference was the importance of religion in the Turkish school. Religious practices were more integrated into daily school life. We observed that religion played a much larger role in the Turkish education system than it does in Austria. This was evident in various aspects, including the presence of religious symbols and the participation in religious activities within the school. Uniforms were another difference that caught our attention. All the students in the Turkish school wore uniforms, which is not a common practice in Austrian schools. This added a sense of formality and discipline to their school environment.

The school also had a tradition of singing the national anthem. Every Monday before the first lesson and every Friday after the last lesson, students and teachers gathered to sing the national anthem. This practice emphasized a strong sense of national pride and unity. Class sizes in the Turkish school were larger, with more students per class compared to our classes in Austria. This difference in student-to-teacher ratio was quite noticeable and made us appreciate the more personalized attention we receive back home.

Lastly, the presence of historical and national symbols was prominent. Photos of former Turkish leaders were displayed on the walls and used as computer backgrounds. This focus on national history and pride was more pronounced than what we typically see in Austrian schools.



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In summary, our visit to the partner school highlighted several differences in infrastructure, daily routines, and cultural practices. Despite these differences, the warm hospitality and the opportunity to experience a different educational system enriched our exchange experience and broadened our perspectives.

6 Surprises in Istanbul

Our time in Istanbul was filled with many surprises that broadened our understanding of the city and its culture. Here are some of the aspects that particularly stood out to us:

The traffic in Istanbul was a common surprise for many of us. It was chaotic and unlike anything we are used to in Austria. The way people drove seemed very disorganized, and it was not uncommon to see motorcyclists without helmets and drivers seemingly ignoring traffic rules. This level of traffic congestion and the intensity of the driving style were both fascinating and a bit intimidating.

The behavior of the people and their general way of living also surprised us. Many of us found that people in Istanbul were very friendly and hospitable. There was a strong sense of community and support among the locals, which was heartwarming. However, some of us also noticed that we were often stared at or approached by locals, which was an unusual experience. The affordability of goods and services in Istanbul was another eye-opener. We were surprised at how cheap everything was compared to Austria. This was particularly noticeable in the markets and when dining out. The low cost of living was a stark contrast to what we are used to back home.

We were also struck by the cultural richness and diversity of the city. The mix of modern and traditional elements in Istanbul's culture, food, and daily life was fascinating. The city's vibrant history and the strong presence of religious practices were evident everywhere we went. The number of restaurants and fast food chains in Istanbul was astonishing. It seemed like there was a place to eat on every corner, offering a wide variety of delicious food. This abundance of food options was both surprising and delightful.

The level of poverty and the economic struggles faced by some of the locals were also unexpected. Hearing our host students talk about the challenges related to the Turkish currency and how some families have to save extensively was eye-opening and made us more aware of the economic differences between our countries. The cleanliness of the city, or the lack thereof, was another surprising aspect. Some of us were taken aback by the level of dirtiness and the frequent unpleasant smells in certain areas. Additionally, the high number of police interventions and the general sense of disorder in some parts of the city were unexpected.

Despite these challenges, the friendliness and solidarity among the people in Istanbul were remarkable. The strong sense of community and the willingness of people to help each other left a lasting impression on us.

In summary, our experience in Istanbul was full of surprises, from the chaotic traffic and friendly locals to the affordable living costs and rich cultural diversity. These unexpected aspects of our trip



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contributed to a deeper understanding of the city and its people, making our exchange all the more memorable.

7 Erasmus Exchange Rating

Overall, our Erasmus exchange program in Istanbul received very positive feedback from all participants. Here's how we rated the experience on a scale of 1 to 5 stars:

- **5 Stars:** The majority of us gave the exchange a perfect score of 5 stars. This high rating reflects our overall satisfaction with the program, the hospitality of our hosts, the richness of cultural experiences, and the friendships we formed. Those who rated it 5 stars felt that the trip exceeded their expectations and provided invaluable learning experiences.
- **4 Stars:** A few of us rated the exchange 4 stars. While we still had a great time and appreciated the experience, there were some minor issues or challenges, such as communication barriers or cultural differences, that prevented us from giving a perfect score. Nevertheless, we found the exchange to be very rewarding and educational.
- **3 Stars:** One participant rated the exchange 3 stars. This rating indicates that while the experience was overall positive, there were notable aspects that could have been improved. These might include the cleanliness of certain facilities or other logistical challenges encountered during the trip.

In summary, the Erasmus exchange to Istanbul was a highly successful and enriching experience for all of us. The majority of participants rated it 5 stars, reflecting the program's positive impact on our cultural understanding.



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