

## **Internship at the International Centre of the University of Bergen, Norway**

### **Before the internship**

My study programme European Culture and Economy (ECUE) at RUB is focused on international cooperation, so an internship abroad is a perfect choice. However, an internship is not strictly mandatory but instead recommended and rewarded with credit points as a part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester's in-depth-module. At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of my studies, I wasn't actively looking for a specific internship position. I was also reluctant to go abroad since I do not come from Germany, and studying in Bochum is already, in a way, a stay abroad for me. I was aware of the opportunities for part-time jobs or unpaid, few-week-long internships in the Ruhrgebiet for ECUE students. I leaned towards the option of staying in Bochum for my internship which I planned to do as a part-time job in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester in order to stay within the regular timeframe of my degree. This whole plan was turned upside down by the kindness of the RUB employees who kept sharing with us, students, internship and course opportunities via the RUB mailbox. I received an email with the description of a full-time internship position at the International Centre of the University of Bergen in Norway. The tasks and requirements matched exactly my skills, interests and motivations for attending my study programme in the first place. Without a doubt, this was the perfect internship position I could dream of. The only catch was the duration – the internship could last either 6 or 12 months, beginning in August 2025. This meant I wouldn't be able to complete my study programme in the regular time. I submitted my application nevertheless, and within 2 weeks I was invited for an interview.

The interview was structured in a way that made it clear to me that I was seriously considered for the position unlike interviews in which institutions merely gather a first impression of all candidates before they begin the first selection. Therefore, during my interview we already discussed the accommodation for my stay in Bergen. I was informed that I would be employed with a status of a guest student of the University of Bergen which gave me the possibility to apply for housing in one of the student dormitories. In this way, I avoided the hassle of searching for accommodation online on the private market. Since the renting process in Norway is not very foreigner-friendly (more often than not, a Norwegian bank account is required), international students are generally prioritised in the allocation of rooms in the student dormitories. Additionally, as an EU citizen and Norway being a member of the Schengen Zone, I was exempt from otherwise obligatory procedures such as registration with the Norwegian police, application for the residence permit and the tax identification number. Moreover, foreigners

coming to Norway have to go through a mandatory tuberculosis test if, prior to coming to Norway, they have visited one of the countries with high incidence of tuberculosis, as estimated by the Norwegian Directorate of Health.



## **Working in Norway**

At the International Centre of UiB I was involved in the Outgoing Erasmus Exchange Team with a few additional tasks from other teams assigned to me. I was supervised by the Erasmus Institutional Coordinator of UiB and our work revolved around the administration of the Erasmus programme for the students of UiB. I took over communication with students both via email and in person. I helped with signing the Erasmus grant agreements, registration of the student exchange data in the systems for the other departments of the university, for the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund and for the Erasmus programme. I calculated the first payment of the Erasmus grant, verified eligibility for the Green Erasmus grant and for top-up for students with fewer opportunities. With time, my tasks became more complex and serious as I gained experience and learnt new processes. I communicated with other departments at UiB and with the partner universities. The job was exciting and each day brought new, unexpected cases to solve. I enjoyed helping the UiB students in preparing or finalising their Erasmus stay. I could sense their enthusiasm about their Erasmus stay and sympathise with their stress about deadlines. Learning the perspective of both sides – the administrative staff and the participant in the Erasmus programme – was very insightful for my internship and taught me a lot about working with people.

I underwent training with other working students at the International Centre and employees responsible for different areas of student mobility. I was invited by other departments such as the UiB Admission Office and the faculties for trainings. Input from different sources improved my learning experience and allowed me to gather broad expertise in the university admission field during my internship. In addition, I got to know many employees of the university which gave me insight into Norwegian work culture. I learnt that quality of work is prioritised over quantity. I enjoyed a great deal of creative freedom in completing my tasks and introducing my own processes to achieve the necessary outcome. If work became stressful I was welcomed to take a coffee break or chat with my colleague about the matter to reduce my anxiety. The colleagues were very supportive and encouraged me to share my feelings and opinions. Every day the entire office had lunch together at 11:30 when everybody met at a long table in the kitchen to share a meal. It was an excellent team-bonding event. Getting to know my colleagues on a personal level improved the professional relations centred around common tasks. I was involved in the team as an equal employee and never had the feeling that I was “only an intern here”. My voice was always heard when I suggested an idea for a possible solution or when I noticed potential risks of a solution being discussed at the time.

Whenever I felt dissatisfied with how the cooperation with a colleague unfolded, it was always clear for me who to speak to about it. My supervisors were always available for this type of inquiries – meaning that they always took the effort to find the time to listen to me even when their schedule was filled with tasks and meetings. The reaction followed immediately and the necessary steps were taken. On one occasion the solution was to organise a meeting with the whole team that the Leader of the International Section attended as well. All together we made a clearly structured division of responsibilities and the timeline for tasks. It was agreed upon in front of the whole team and the Section Leader which tasks are assigned to each team member. We all left the meeting very satisfied and with exclusively positive feelings. My supervisors thanked me for speaking up when I noticed a problem in the functioning of the office that affected me. They encouraged me to not be shy about it and to react as soon as something was making me anxious.



## **Free time in Bergen**

As the text above indicates, most of my energy was invested into the job. In my free time I aimed to compensate for the time spent at my desk in the office by staying active outdoors. I did a lot of hiking in the mountains in the city of Bergen. Sauna sessions combined with ice baths in the ocean were a great way to unwind. I took long walks in the thick forests behind the city buildings or jogged along the bays and fjords. Bergen offers a lot of scenic paths to hike and places to do various outdoor sports. Even though the darkness in winter was challenging at times, it also allowed for the most magical evenings with the northern lights dancing above the city lights which were directly visible from my window.

## **Best and worst**

My best experience was hiking with new friends in the mountains. It felt amazing to spend time in this very healthy and special way with dear people. It is very common in Norway to spend time with friends in an active way, outdoors. I had the impression that a lot of international students visiting Norway are very keen on enjoying the Norwegian nature and doing sports together. It was very easy to find motivated partners to go on long hiking trips and swim in the cold sea together.

My worst experience was the widespread alcohol consumption among young people that happened in Bergen every week on Friday and Saturday evening. On Friday nights the city was filled with visibly intoxicated Norwegians who would stumble in the streets, vomit on

public transport or without hesitation openly ask you out for a casual sexual encounter. At times it was really unpleasant and irritating. However, the behaviour was never loaded with aggression and I would not describe the atmosphere in the city at Friday night as frightening or unsafe. A “No” was always accepted as a reply to the above-mentioned invitation and the interaction ended immediately there. This phenomenon is apparently a part of the Norwegian culture and foreigners visiting the country should be aware that they may encounter it.

