

Testimonial for University of Eastern Finland

I spent my year abroad at the University of Eastern Finland (UEF) in Joensuu, Finland. For me, it was an opportunity to “go home” to my birthplace, which made it a very special experience for me. Since I am a Finnish citizen, I cannot speak to the logistics of obtaining a student visa or Finnish bank account. However, I can share my experience at the university, and what I learned while I was there.

One of my biggest recommendations for students going to UEF is to get to know the Finnish students! The School of Forest Sciences at UEF is a relatively small school, meaning there is a great sense of community. Getting involved in the community will allow you to make the most of the time you spend in Joensuu. The best ways to get involved are attending events put on by the student association, stop by their office in the Borealis building and chat up fellow students! One event that is a must for attending is Räkäposkella, which is a 12h team skiing relay event in February. It’s a great way to experience a favourite Finnish winter pastime, as well as spend time with fellow forestry students. By immersing yourself with Finnish students, you’ll get to experience Joensuu and Finnish culture from the perspective of locals, which is quite different from the international student experience.

That said, the international student experience is worth experiencing too. ESN (Erasmus Student Network) Joensuu runs a lot of events and opportunities for international students to meet each other as well. I would recommend attending these events and getting to know fellow international students living in Joensuu as well! ESN offers great trips to places like Lapland and Russia – I went on one to Minsk, Belarus to see the Ice Hockey World Championships! It’s a great way to get to know students and see different parts of Finland and northern Europe! Joensuu has a large number of students from all over the world, so there is a great community there too to meet people from a variety of places.

Finnish culture is something that is worth immersing yourself in while in Finland. Joensuu has a polar bear club, where there is a sauna on a lake which I highly recommend trying at least once. Bonus points if you try in the winter, and take a dip in the frozen lake! There are also a lot of beautiful natural places to visit in the region, and farther away as well if you’re feeling adventurous. A few I recommend are Koli National Park, Kolvananuuro, Lapland (especially to see the northern lights) and Lake Saimaa. Spending time in the outdoors is very easy in Joensuu, with so many trails along the river and lake and through the forests of the region.

A bike is a must-have for getting around, as public transportation can be expensive. Look early, as there tends to be a shortage of bikes come the beginning of term! There is also a bike rental shop in the city centre that is worth checking out if you don’t buy your own. Second hand stores are a great way to save money while living in Finland. Joensuu has several, and I highly recommend visiting them! They’re also a great way to sell any extra items you may have at the end of your time in Finland!

In terms of school itself, I was pleased with the variety of classes that were offered for Master’s students in forestry. I found there was enough variety for me to choose from that allowed me to shape my curriculum based on my interests. Don’t be afraid to ask for guidance about classes, either from other students, professors, or from your Transfor-M advisor. I would recommend looking into the BOVA exchange courses while in Finland. I took a course on short rotation forestry for bioenergy production which was held in Jelgava, Latvia. BOVA covered the costs associated with the course and provided a travel stipend, making such an experience financially feasible. It was really interesting to get to spend a week in Latvia and learn about forestry there, as well as meet students from around the world who share the same

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interests. I'd say if you take the initiative to search out courses that fit your interests and ask around for alternative opportunities for courses, you can make the most of your academic year in Finland.

Along with the variety of topics that were available, courses were also offered in a variety of different formats. There are field courses, such as Winter Ecology, where much of the time is spent collecting data. There are also lecture-based courses, seminars, courses with lab components, independent study courses, group discussion courses and courses that allow you to develop your skills with computer programs (such as ToSia and ArcGIS). Therefore, I found the selection of courses to cater to the development of a variety of skills while learning about a variety of topics.

The Transfor-M program is a great way to get international experience, create a global network of peers and open your mind to points of view regarding forestry from a variety of countries. I have found the networking opportunities of Transfor-M to be equally as valuable as the academic components of earning two Master's degrees. Though completion of the program takes a lot of planning, time management and dedication, the personal connections and knowledge gained by the end is incredibly rewarding and well worth the time.