Student’s info:

Name, Last name: Anna Matora  
Age: 19  
Gender: female  
Home Institution: Riga Graduate School of Law  
Country of Home Institution: Latvia

Host Institution: University of Lapland  
Subject Area: Law and Diplomacy  
Length of Study Period: one semester

ERASMUS+ program is definitely a life changing experience. It creates a possibility not only to live in a completely international environment but to gain friends all around the world. Because University of Lapland has agreements with a wide range of universities, I had a chance to meet people from Asia, Africa, Australia, North and South Americas, and of course Europe.

These five months were unforgettable and I am extremely thankful for the opportunity to be part of the ERASMUS program. If I will have another chance to go on exchange I will definitely use it without any hesitation. Studying in another country gave an opportunity to take subjects that I do not have in my home university, such as climate change related courses and to visit lectures that are meant for the masters program.
University life

University of Lapland gave an opportunity to choose the level of difficulty for studying. There was a possibility to take independent studies courses (which in my opinion are harder), meaning that a teacher will assign a certain number of literature and then there will be an exam based on the given material, but there will be no lectures provided. Another possibility was to take lecture based courses and then teacher will assign some work. Usually it required to make a presentation, write an essay or lecture journal, group work, active class participation etc. In most of the subjects there was an opportunity to choose how many ECTS points you want to get from the course. For example one of the courses could give 1.5 ECTS for class participation and a test, 4 ECTS for class participation, test and an essay, or 5 ECTS for all of the previous component as well as presentation of the essay. Some subjects, like Law of the Sea require participation in a conference which is usually held in the research center as well as the museum – Arktikum.

During orientation week, university organized different events for all of us to get to know each other. On our first day they rented a local café where they provided some snacks. Each week they sent information on different events and sights that we could visit in Rovaniemi.
University provides accommodation for local as well as for international students. All of the exchange students live together in the Kuntotie area, which is approximately 3 km away from university. We decided to walk everywhere since the city was not very big, but a lot of students also use bicycles. Buses do not go very often and during winter it is common for them to be late, therefore not a lot of students use this option. Because I went together with my course mate we decided to rent small two bedroom apartment together, but there is also a possibility to rent a studio, or two or three bedroom apartment. Because all students lived together it gave us all a possibility to find friends from different faculties whom otherwise we would not have met.
Finnish Friend Program

University of Lapland and University of Applied Science organized this program for exchange students to get to know Finnish culture better. Local people apply for this program and then based on your preferences and interests you get a friend, or like in my case a family. Getting a family is a big luck because it gives a chance to see the life of Lappish people from the inside. They taught us how to do some of the national dishes and took us with them to try all the activities which we might not have done by ourselves. Together with the Finnish family we went outside the city, did barbecue near the river, tried cross country skiing on a frozen river, went to see the ice castle and ice hotel, went to watch local football game, tried husky riding, visited Ranua zoo, played traditional Finnish games and much more. These people were so open and friendly it felt like they did become my second family. And whenever I will return to Finland, I know that I have amazing friends there who will always be happy to help.
Rovaniemi, Finland

The city itself is not very big, but in winter when everything is covered in snow it is very beautiful and magical. Local population said that during summer this place also looks beautiful, but unfortunately I did not have enough time to witness it. Nevertheless I did manage to see how Rovaniemi looks without any snow. But weather was not the only thing that changed in these five months. The duration of the day became much longer. When we just arrived in January we could witness sun light only for few hours a day, but on our last days at the end of May summer went down only after midnight.

Besides its beautiful nature, Rovaniemi is an official home of Santa Claus. And even if you don`t believe in Santa anymore, in Santa Claus village there is always a magical and festive atmosphere. In this village they have a post office where you can send a postcard that will arrive next Christmas. More than that, it is located on the border of Arctic Circle and it is possible to get a stamp in your passport stating that you have crossed the Arctic Circle. 😊

Probably the most breathtaking experience was to witness the northern lights, which are known there as Aurora Borealis. During first weeks we all were very excited and organized “hunt” on the northern lights but we were not successful. We heard that the northern lights are more active during March and it is true. Even though we all had to wait for more than two months to witness it, the experience was definitely worth the wait.