

Kokkola will always have a part of me

My name is Laura Ortiz and I'm from Spain, concretely Barcelona.

Before all of that, while I was thinking about the Erasmus, I had some options of places where I could go but from the beginning I was sure that I wanted to come to Finland. During my stay here, many people asked me lots of times why I've chosen Finland if it is a very cold country and there is nothing to do here in winter.

I wanted a place which is different from my home city, somewhere that I was not used to, I wanted to feel that everything was new for me.

Finnish people are used to that cold weather and bored of it, but instead for me it has been amazing going out every morning and see all the street full of snow, being at that low temperature and realize that I can be there and everything is fine. I felt like a child playing with the snow and at that moment I didn't care about anything else.

I have to say that before coming here I was so scared about my choice, the people, the language, the weather and all. But once I finished my stay, I can say that I couldn't have chosen a better place. I really fell in love with Finland.

And now let's talk a bit about my time here.

I've been working most of the time as a graphic designer in different places. I worked from Mondays to Fridays helping the communication or the marketing department in all I could. Some of the tasks that I did in relation to graphic designs were creating a design for a school tote bag, designing some posters and table cards for an event that was going on in the school, create an info photo to show on the screens to students and design templates for the social media of the university.

One week I moved to Kannus, which is near to Kokkola and there I worked as a helping coordinator, we had to organize, supervise and take care of a group of students who came to spend a week in Finland. We prepare for them lots of activities to make their stay wonderful. It was also so nice for me because a part of helping them I had the chance to try many activities which I have never tried before, like country skiing, snowshoes or ice bathing.

Once I was at Kokkola again, I had to prepare a few things about my country to explain them to some students. It was a great opportunity to be proud of Spain and let the students know a bit more about where I'm from, our culture, food, parties and many good things that Spain has.

To feel myself more finish I also had the chance to try some typical food like the salmon soup, Karjalanpiirakka with butter and egg, Maami, reindeer meat and grill some sausages and marshmallows which I really like it.

One of my aims here was travelling around Finland, to know more places apart from Kokkola. My dreamed place was Lapland, I always wanted to go and as I was here, I had to go yes or yes. Everything in the north was so amazing, I could see lot of snow and I did many activities like snowmobile, swimming in the Arctic Ocean, country skiing, hiking in the national park, sledge with huskies and going to visit Santa! I loved the place.

I also did a little route around Finland where I went to the most important cities. I travelled to Helsinki, Tampere, Turku and Oulu. In every of those places, I went around to see the monuments,



parks and also the bars, everything is important! All the cities were different between them, but I really enjoyed them all.

But not all is working and travelling, I had a lot of free time around the city. I met a group of Erasmus students like me. They were people from all parts of the world and it was so fun talking about our countries, compare them and teach things among us. We made a really good friendship and that made my stay here easier. We had parties every weekend, we sang together in the karaoke many times and made lots of plans, those are things that I will remember all my life.

One of the things that call my attention is how much Finnish people love the sauna, they want to do it all the time so I also did a lot of sauna here. I was not used to it, but it feels so relaxing and good.

And now talking about the people and culture here, people here are more closed than in Spain for example, and it was a bit hard at the beginning to get to know people but every single person who I met here has been so nice with me, in the work everyone tried to talk to me and made me feel part of the group, and out of work I had the chance to meet more people and it was so good having that opportunity. Another thing that I really like from Finland is how safe it is, you can leave your things without risk that someone stole them, you can walk alone late at night and anything happen or ask for help and everyone is there for you.

And as I said before, I enjoyed a lot the Finish sauna but what I really enjoyed more is ice bath or snow after sauna, I loved that contrast between cold and hot. I've never done it before and it feels so good. I did it many times and I don't get bored of it.

I could also see the northern lights for the first time in my life and I'm so grateful for that.

To finish with that report, I would like to reflect on what these two months have meant to me:

Being on Erasmus is feeling at home when you are thousands of kilometers away from your city, is finding people who you didn't know before and realize that they are your family here. You start knowing parts of yourself that you didn't know before, you discover the world and how to be out of your comfort zone. You start to do things alone that you've never thought of it before. You realize how much you miss people who are far but learn how to deal with it and then wait and look forward to seeing them more.

While you are in the Erasmus, it's like a stop in time in your life, where you are living every moment with the 100% of your energy, wanting to do as many things as possible and without saying no to any plan, enjoying and thinking that none of this will happen again.

Since I was a child, I have always wanted to do an Erasmus and live abroad for some months and now I have done it and I can say that Erasmus has been one of the most intense and strong experiences of my life but at the same time the one that most fill my heart.

I have been really happy here and I learnt a lot. I hope one day I can come back again.

Finland and specially Kokkola will always have a part of me.

