

# Erasmus Semester at Koç University, Istanbul

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My Erasmus semester at Koç University in Istanbul was one of the best experiences of my life. I made new friends from around the world and experienced significant personal growth. Choosing Istanbul for my exchange broadened my perspective, stepping out of my familiar Western world and opening my eyes to the diversity of our planet.

## Before Arrival

The application process for the Erasmus program and enrollment at Koç University was smooth and straightforward. However, there were some minor issues with the learning agreement due to the lack of a proper course list at the time. It's worth noting that you will most likely need to make adjustments to your course plan anyway due to schedule overlaps or unavailability of certain subjects. On a positive note, I discovered an additional course that wasn't initially offered. Although course planning and enrollment can be a bit complicated, the tutors at Koç University provide excellent support during orientation week.

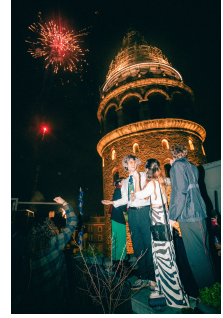
For phone connectivity, I organized a pop-up extension to my German phone plan for an extra €10, allowing me to use my regular contract in Turkey as if I were in Germany.

As a German citizen, you don't need to worry about a visa for Turkey initially. You can enter as a tourist for up to 90 days and then arrange for a student visa once you're there. Koç University offers significant support with this somewhat complicated process. Just ensure your passport is valid for the duration of your exchange and that you have health insurance.

Regarding finances, it's useful to have some Turkish Lira before arriving, but the most important thing is to have a credit or debit card, preferably one that doesn't charge extra fees for international transactions.

For accommodation, I found a room in a shared flat via Airbnb, although this might not be feasible now due to new laws in Turkey. I recommend connecting with other Erasmus students beforehand to find a flat together. My flat was near the 4. Levent metro station, conveniently located between Koç University and Taksim, one city

center. If you prefer city life, aim for a flat close to the M2 Metro line, which is about an hour away from the university. Alternatively, for a more campus-centered experience, consider the "West Campus" (Bati-Campus) in Sariyer. Koç University also offers dormitories, but they are shared rooms, difficult to secure, and not necessarily cheaper than a flat.



## After Arrival

The first few days in Istanbul can be overwhelming due to the sheer size of the city. Avoid scams at the airport, especially from taxi drivers, but don't hesitate to ask locals for help. But it is important to mention, that a lot of people in Istanbul don't speak (proper) English. Public transportation options from both airports, including metro and shuttle buses, are excellent.

The public transport system in Istanbul is extensive, with numerous metro lines and buses. Most require an "Istanbul Card", which you load with money for use across various modes of transport (except the airport shuttle and dolmuş / mini-buses). After receiving your student card, you can get a "student Istanbul Card", allowing you to use the subscription feature. This costs about 250 TL and offers 200 free rides per month. For navigating, Google Maps is useful, but the "Moovit" app or searching specific bus lines on the IETT website can be more precise.

Taxis in Istanbul are affordable, but be cautious of scams. Ensure the meter is on, and have cash for payment. For extra security, use the "BiTaksi" app, similar to Uber but officially sanctioned by the municipality.

Dolmuş and minibuses are great alternatives, but they require cash. Koç University offers a shuttle service between the main and West campuses (free) and between Haciosman Metro Station (last station of the m2 line in the north) and the university (paid).

The orientation week at Koç University is incredibly helpful for handling administrative tasks and meeting fellow Erasmus students. The university also provides substantial support for obtaining your residence permit, a process that can be quite complex.

## The City

Istanbul, a metropolis with over 16 million residents straddling two continents, is vibrant and culturally rich, influenced by both Europe and Asia. The city is dynamic and diverse, offering daily events for everyone. Despite being the most visited city in the world in 2023, you can only truly appreciate its beauty by living there. However, it also has its challenges, such as high inflation and economic difficulties, which are visible in the faces of its people.



## The University

Koç University is one of the top universities in Turkey, influenced by

the American education system and staffed with highly educated faculty. The campus location is both a strength and a drawback. Although it requires considerable travel if you live centrally in the city, its location in the forest in the far north of Istanbul, with stunning views of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, provides a peaceful counterbalance to the busy city.

The students at Koç University are diverse. Alongside well-educated and open-minded peers, you'll also meet students from affluent backgrounds. The university boasts a vibrant club culture, with numerous serious and engaging clubs, ensuring you won't be bored whether you live on campus or in the city.

## Travel and Exploration

Beyond Istanbul, Turkey offers numerous travel destinations worth exploring. Early in the semester, I visited Fethiye with the mountaineering club. October is the perfect time for this beautiful place, and it became my favorite destination of the semester.



Cappadocia is a must-see, famous for its hot air balloons, unique landscapes, and rich history. It's worth visiting in any season, whether in the heat of summer or the snow of winter.



Towards the end of the semester, my friends and I embarked on a road trip from Istanbul to Izmir along Turkey's west coast. In one weekend, we swam in the warm Aegean Sea, explored the ruins of Pergamon, and hiked a snowy mountain. This trip highlighted the incredible diversity of Turkey's landscapes and cultural

heritage, all within a relatively short distance from Istanbul. Traveling off-season made the experience more relaxed and affordable.



I highly recommend exploring beyond Istanbul to truly experience Turkey's cultural richness and diversity. Istanbul alone doesn't represent the entirety of Turkey, and visiting various regions will provide a fuller understanding of this fascinating country.