

## ERASMUS Karolinska Institutet WS 09/10

Karolinska Institutet

MAS- Biomedical Research Project 18 ECTS (4 months internship)

Smittskyddsinstitutet (SMI), group Prof. Maeurer, Immunology and Vaccination

### Before:

I am part of the Master program “Molecular Biosciences” and the Major “Infectious Diseases”. That is why I decided to apply for the ERASMUS exchange program with the Karolinska Institutet (KI), having a lot of research groups which are mostly orientated in the direction of biomedical research. Here I completed my “Working in Biosciences” practical. In January 2009 I first had to apply in Heidelberg. The Heidelberg-ERASMUS- Team accepted me and thus I was nominated. The following step was to apply at the Karolinska Institutet directly. After a couple of weeks, I got a mail from the international coordinator Malin Ahlén, telling me that I was accepted. Now I was able to start to search for a research group. This step took quite some time and I had to write a lot of mails before I finally got a phone interview with Prof. Maeurer. As soon as I had his confirmation I applied for a room in one of the student dorms, Pax, in Stockholm using the online form of the UAC (<http://www.uac.se>). It's only allowed to apply for a room, if you can name a supervisor. I got a room offer a couple of weeks later.

### Arrival:

In the end of September 2009 I flew to Stockholm. Stockholm has two airports, Arlanda (45 min by public transportation) and Skavsta (2 hours by bus). I decided to fly with SAS because here one has included 20 kg luggage and they fly to Arlanda. In the end it was as cheap as Ryanair (they fly to Skavsta). After staying with a friend for a couple of days, I got my key for my room at the UAC office which is located on the campus Solna. Since I arrived in the middle of the term I missed the introduction day for exchange students where things like matriculation, KI card etc are usually handled. Instead, I and some other exchange students had an appointment with Malin who did a great job and had everything prepared. We got all our documents and she signed us in for a language course. In order to be able to get a student ticket for public transportation (<http://www.sl.se>) and a student ID card one needs to be a member of a student s union. In our case this was the Medicinska Föreningen and we had to pay a fee of 470 krona once.

### Pax (student dorm):

The student dorm Pax is quite old und during my stay they refurbished the kitchens and bathrooms. Fortunately my bathroom was already finished when I arrived. The room was pretty big and ok. Due to the refurbishment it was pretty dirty and also noisy. But since I was in the lab most of the time during the day, it didn't bother me that much. Since my kitchen was getting refurbished, I had to escape and use another. I was pretty lucky because I found really good friends in that kitchen and compared to some other kitchens ours was clean and was also kept clean. A laundry room and a sauna are in the basement and one could use them for free. Unfortunately I got one of the rooms with bed bugs. This problem occurs pretty often in the student dorm and those little bugs come out at night and bite. It itches extremely bad, much worse than mosquito bites. I showed my bites to a floor mate and he told me to call the guys from Anticimex right ahead. A couple of days later they sprayed my room and I got rid of those horrible creatures. It took about 15 min by bus to the campus Solna and about 10 min by tunnelbana to the city center. The tunnelbana station Västra Skogen is located right in front of the dorm. Coop and another little supermarket are next to the station.

### Internship:

It took me about a week to fill out all the paperwork before I could finally start at the SMI. My group was pretty international and I had a good time there. I got two little projects and after a short while I was able to work on them on my own. Since my group was also part of the Department of Molecular, Tumor and Cell Biology (MTC), it was possible to attend a couple of seminars there. The MTC also had a pub night once a month. Many PhD students and trainees attended those nights and it was good fun. Additionally to my lab work I also took part in a Swedish course. The course took part twice a week in the evening for 5 weeks. It was organized by a language school. We learned some basics, but I have to admit that I didn't do enough to be able to say more than a few sentences. However reading and also understanding did really improve over time.

The KI has also a group that organizes some events and trips for exchange students. They are called "global friends". Amongst other things we went to a cabin in Solvik just outside Stockholm which was really nice.

### Stockholm and Sweden:

Stockholm is a really nice city but an expensive one. Going out or just having a beer in a pub is quite expensive (120 kronor entrance for a club or 50 kronor for a beer). Also groceries are more expensive than in Germany. The cheapest choice was LIDL located at Fridhemsplan, two tunnelbana stations away from Västra Skogen. Prisextra and DagLivs are two other big supermarkets there, whereas the first one is also not that expensive. Stockholm is a real Nordic city with an old part called Gamla Stan and has a lot of museums. The Vasa Museet is one of the most famous ones and one should visit it. Skansen is sort of an open air museum and shows historical villages and also some Scandinavian animals. The Christmas market is the best in town and also has the best glögg. Some other museums such as the Nordiska museet or the Stockholm Stadsmuseet are for free (at least on some days). We were also pretty lucky because we had snow from the middle of December until February. Thus it wasn't that bad that the darkest days of the year had dawn at 10 am and sun set at 2 pm. The November however was pretty bad and depressing because it was just grey, grey and grey. Fortunately we got really lucky and one of the Sundays was sunny. On this day we took the ferry to Finnhamn, an island in the archipelago which is also a definitive must. In January almost all lakes and waterways in and around Stockholm were completely frozen and one could walk on the ice. Another thing which I would highly recommend is to travel a bit. We visited Helsinki and Tallinn by ferry. Especially Tallinn is a beautiful city, even at -17°C. We also went to Kiruna, a town located north of the Arctic circle. I had the best time ever up there and we saw the Icehotel, a hotel completely made out of ice, drove snow mobiles, made a tour with a dogsledge and experienced a 110 degree shift going from the sauna outside.

All in all I can just say that I had an awesome time in Sweden, met many nice people and fell in love with lingonsylt and kanelbullar. I will definitively come back, preferably in summer ☺!

If you have questions or would like to know more just contact me: [steffi.florida@web.de](mailto:steffi.florida@web.de)