

**It is a new storytime! This time Aldona will tell us about her Erasmus+ experience in Turkey!**

*Hi! Can you please introduce yourself and tell us about your hobbies?*

Hi! My name is Aldona and I'm in my first year of master's in Art Education. I'm 23 years old, live in a small town called Olesno, which is close to Opole. My hobbies are painting, gaming and crocheting - a typical introvert type.

*Could you tell us what place you decided to choose as your Erasmus+ destination and how long you stayed there? What was your first feeling when you arrived there? What did you hear about this city before and what you were excited about?*

Firstly, I went to Ostrava in the Czech Republic for one year. It's just 2h away from Opole by car. I chose it because it was a very safe option for me, similar culture, language, cheap and close to home if I don't like it there. I heard only good stuff about it, it's one of the popular Erasmus+ destinations in my faculty and I wasn't disappointed, it was one of the best decisions in my life. My first feelings were mostly stress and being nervous because my English wasn't the best and I ended up on a floor full of Asian students, no friends and no internet in my part of the dorm. But very fast I found good friends there that I'm still keeping close contact with.

Now I'm on my second Erasmus in Eskisehir in Turkey. Way bigger city than Ostrava and Opole (800k people living there) and a completely different world. I was very excited because I visited Turkey before for a short time and I loved it and my boyfriend moved there with me (he is Turkish).

*Why did you decide to choose Eskisehir as your Erasmus destination?*

I decided to choose this country because of my boyfriend. He had a lot of stuff to finish in his home country and I had the possibility to go there with him for my Erasmus+ exchange to pursue my Master's Degree. I really liked Turkey and it also was a great opportunity to learn more about the culture, language and travel there.

*Can you tell us a little bit more about the application process. Is it hard? Do you have any suggestions for students who want to take part in the Erasmus+ program as well?*

The application process is pretty easy but time-consuming and you need to remember to have your passport and visa ready a few months before. I didn't have any problems in the embassy, my visa was ready within 15min, just travelling to Warsaw is a disadvantage if you live far away.

*Did it take you a lot of time to decide whether you should travel to Turkey or not? What ultimately convinced you?*

It took me a while. The cultural differences are visible, for any extra document, I couldn't just go back to the Czech Republic but further in life, I would not have such an occasion to study and travel with the comfort of an Erasmus scholarship. So I decided to come.

*What do you like the most about this place?*

Definitely food. Turkey has way more and way better traditional food than Poland. It's in every corner, at any time, even in the middle of the night there are always some places open.

*What surprised you the most when you started living there?*

Lack of English speakers. Even among professors and students, it's pretty rare to find someone who speaks it fluently.

*Why do you think it's a good idea to study in a different country? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this decision?*

These are definitely friendships. Just by coming to Ostrava, I have friends from 10 different countries. Also, it's an amazing time to practice languages. The disadvantage for me is leaving family far away but it was also a chance for them to visit me.

*What do you recommend to do in Eskisehir? How can you spend your free time there?*

They have very pretty nature areas for walks and a Disney castle (a very nice photo spot!). With friends, we usually just go out to eat regional food, visit some pubs/clubs or cinemas to watch movies with English dubbing.

*Your favourite places in Eskisehir and close to this city. What are the best places to visit? Did you visit any other places in Turkey?*

I think it's Odunpazarı, it's a very colourful, kind of old, Amsterdam-styled street. There are: an art museum, wax museum, a lot of good, peaceful cafes and one of the oldest (50 years old) kebab restaurants in Eskisehir Köfteci Ahmet.

*How about the transport? Is it hard to find buses/ trains/ flights to other places?*

There are a lot of direct buses from Eskisehir to other big cities in Turkey, a little bit expensive but there is WiFi, snacks, water or tea and workers are waking you up for your stops. There are fewer train connections but they are way cheaper than buses and we even had an airport but for some reason, it only had one flight and it flew to Brussels and back.

*What are Turkish people like?*

Very generous. If they like you they are often willing to give you some, let's say, tea or dessert for free or even, if they don't speak English, they will help you find your way. It never happened to me in Poland.

*Do Turkish people know English and should the foreigners know at least a little bit of Turkish?*

English is quite unpopular, surprisingly more people speak Russian or at least understand it more than English. For sure, you have to learn a few basic words and it's good to download a Turkish translator which can help you at any time, even when you don't have an internet connection.

*Is Turkey an expensive country?*

For every European, yes. However, as long as I have my scholarship, I'm able to rent a 2 room apartment and still live comfortably. Compared to the Czech Republic, I had to live in a dorm with a roommate.

*Are there any disadvantages of choosing Eskisehir as your studies destination?*

I study at the art faculty and it's a very underpaid place. The building is way bigger than the one in Opole but doesn't have much equipment. Also, it's sometimes difficult to communicate with some professors because they don't speak English.

*Were classes at this university hard?*

I didn't have any theoretical exams, during the semester we were just giving presentations and I didn't have any bigger problems with it.

*Your favourite Turkish food! What can you recommend to non-Turkish people?*

Lahmacun! It's kind of a very thin Turkish pizza filled with meat. You eat it with some salad and fresh lemon juice. Very cheap, very tasty, I will miss it so much when I leave.

*Would you recommend the Erasmus+ program to others?*

Of course! It's almost impossible to have such an easy opportunity to travel and study abroad anywhere else and with a scholarship.

*Thank you so much for sharing your experience with us! :)*

Thank you as well!