

TU Graz exchange report
Spring term 2018
Master degree in Aalto: Advanced Energy Solutions

I spent the spring of 2018 as an exchange student in Graz, Austria. Basically, since the beginning of my studies I knew that I wanted to do an exchange in a German-speaking country, mostly to refresh my language skills. Graz and Austria struck me as an optimal destination. Applying for the exchange didn't cause me problems. A B2 level English certificate is required for TU Graz and that I got in the language centre of Aalto after a short 15min discussion with an English teacher. Also, I could choose my courses in Graz quite freely, since I had still 25-30 ECTS of elective studies to do. And this is something that I can recommend, it makes the studying in the exchange destination very flexible.

The semester in Graz starts in the beginning of March. However, the University of Graz (Karl-Franzens-University) organizes a three-week German intensive course in February, in which the students of the technical university can also attend. I had heard a lot of positive feedback from this course and thus chose to do it as well. The course costs approximately 200 euros, but during the three weeks you make a lot of friends, get to know your fellow exchange students and the city itself, learn some German and get 6 ECTS points for the course. So, in my opinion it was worth it. The lectures were every weekday from 9-12 and then the rest of the day was free time.

So, I travelled to Graz in the beginning of February to take part on this course. TU Graz organizes separate orientation sessions for students taking the language course and for students who arrive later. This was good, and we got all the important information regarding course registrations, citizenship registration and etc. already before the language course started.

In March the real semester began. TU Graz offers a lot of courses and it was not a problem to find interesting ones. The only small challenge was to find a suitable schedule. I tried to fit most of the lectures between Tuesday and Thursday so that some weekend trips would be easier to arrange, but I didn't quite manage to have Monday and Friday off. To be honest, in the end that didn't matter that much since Austria has a lot of national holidays during the spring where everyone has a long weekend. TU Graz offers different types of courses: some of the courses last the whole semester (this is what the courses typically in Aalto are like), but some are so called block-courses or seminar courses. They last for example a week and the lectures are every day from 9-17. This can be confusing from time to time and the schedule can be quite messy, but it also gives a lot of flexibility when it comes to choosing your courses and timetable. I recommend downloading the TU Graz app, which is called **Studo**, because it has a good calendar in it. During the semester I did altogether 32 ECTS credits, of which two thirds I studied in German and then a few courses in English.

There are a lot of living options in Graz. There are many different student dorms as well as a lot of private sector housing (WG = Wohngemeinschaft). I lived in a student dorm on Moserhofgasse, which I got through OeAD. They provide student housing in all of Austria and in Graz they have 4 different dorms. The housing was alright in my opinion. I shared an apartment with one other student. We had our own rooms, and the kitchen/dining room and toilet we shared. I paid 400e per month and it included everything, even a cleaning service once per week. I was satisfied with my option, but if I had had more time around November/December, I would have looked more into WG-housing. This is by far the most popular way the local students live. And also, it is a little cheaper. This way you could have local flatmates and learn German a lot more efficiently. The dorm where I lived was mostly occupied by exchange students so the dominating language was English. All in all, if you want to speak German and have the time to look for a WG, this is a really good option and it can save you some euros, but I can also recommend the Moserhofgasse dorm. It

was a relatively new building, quite clean and conveniently located, especially to the Inffeld Campus (one of three campus areas of TU Graz).

The cost of living in Graz was roughly the same as in Finland, maybe a tad cheaper. Eating and drinking out is definitely cheaper. However, the food on campus was more expensive than in Finland, like it probably is in most European countries. But still you could get a decent meal for roughly 5€ in the cafeteria, which are called "Mensa".

Graz is a middle-sized city with a population of roughly 300 000, of which tens of thousands are students. The city is lively, cosy, not too big and not too small, and this I enjoyed a lot. Graz has a good network of public transport (busses and trams) but the best way to move around is by bike. Almost everyone has a bike. I got mine from a second hand shop for 80 euros, but also cheaper options are available. Best way is to look in the few biggest facebook groups for exchange students in Graz and see if someone is leaving and selling theirs. The market is vast when the previous exchange students leave and the new ones arrive. So it is definitely not a problem to get a bike. With the bike, you can get almost anywhere in the inner city within 20-30 minutes, at least to all the different campuses, OeAD dorms and most of the other student dorms as well. When biking around, remember that you need to have a front and back light when it's dark (cycling usually happens among the cars) and that you shouldn't cycle when drunk, because you can get fined up to 1000 euros for that.

Doing sports in Graz was in my opinion not as easy as in Finland but quite alright nevertheless. The biggest challenge for me personally was the lack of a gym on campus or in connection with the university. The university offers a ton of different sport courses (literally almost anything you could think of, from darts to paragliding) that are quite cheap. But they are organized and scheduled courses, for example football once a week. If you want to work out on your own time, the university doesn't offer that. All the gyms are commercial chains, the biggest being FitInn. They offer a membership for 20€/month but you have to sign up for one year. The ESN (Erasmus student Network) has a deal with one gym, the clever fit gym that is right next to the main railway station. There I could get a membership for 4 months and it also cost 20€/month. The gym itself was pretty good!

During my free time in Graz I travelled a lot, participated in events organized by the ESN and often just hung out with friends I met during the semester. Graz is very well located in eastern-central Europe and it is easy and quite inexpensive to travel around. I visited amongst others Budapest, Vienna, Prague, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Trieste, Bratislava and so on... plus Austria is beautiful and has a lot of nice places to offer. In the winter I went skiing a few times. The ESN also organized a day trip to a smaller ski resort in southern Austria. When spring came, and the snow started to melt, I went hiking nearly every weekend. Smaller but still decent mountains are reachable by train within half an hour. And bigger and higher peaks are a 1,5-2h train ride away. Of course a rental car is most convenient. The Austrian train company (ÖBB) offers a discount card for all under the age of 26 years. The card costs 20€ but with it you can get up to 60% off ticket prices. So if you are planning to travel even a little around by train, I would recommend getting the card. Another great way to travel is by Flixbus.

All in all the exchange semester was awesome and I would gladly recommend Graz for anyone, who wants to go to a German speaking destination. Graz has a very active student scene and there you won't get bored, that's for sure. Austria is a very beautiful country, and also it serves as a great hub for travelling around.

Below are some pictures of some trips and places that I visited in Austria. These are also places that I can recommend visiting from Graz. But these are only some places and there's so much more to see and experience!



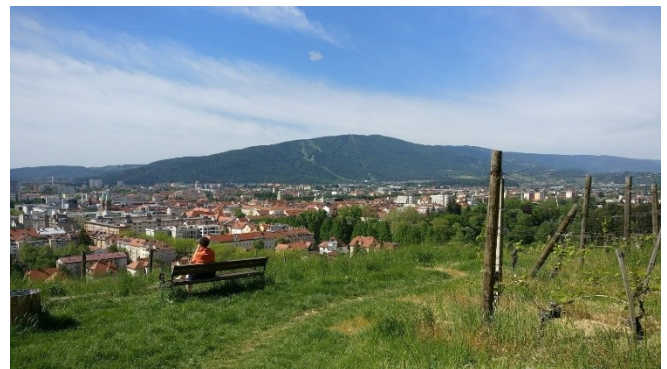
Skiing trip to Bad Gastein. It's approximately 3h from Graz by car/train so not in the very neighbourhood but still quite close



Day trip to Hallstatt, got really lucky with the weather on that day!



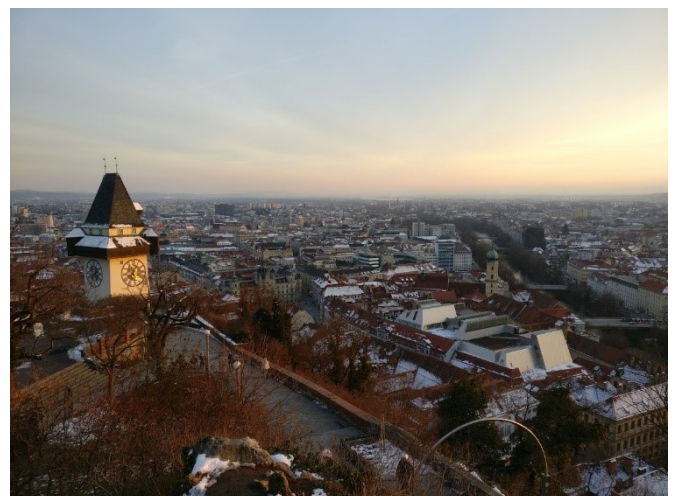
Grüner See (Green lake) is approx. 80km from Graz. Really nice place to visit in May/June but avoid weekends, the place is quite touristy.



Maribor, Slovenia. From Graz it is only 70km to the Slovenian border, so this is a great place to go for a day trip. Great wine tasting and vineyards.



So many great places to go hiking. This is in Tauplitz, roughly 1,5h from Graz.



Graz itself is charming. This is the view from Schlossberg, Graz's own little hill, on a sunny and crisp winter day.