

Auslands-Studienaufenthalt an der

Universität: Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

Stadt/Land: Jerusalem/Israel

besuchte Studienrichtung an der Gastuniversität: Photography

Aufenthaltssemester / -jahr: SS18

Studienrichtung an der KUNI: Grafik-Design und Fotografie

Meine Erfahrungen

- about the study (courses / professors / students / exchange office)

When I thought about choosing a University for my exchange, Jerusalem wasn't my first thought. But after some research and regarding my thirst for adventure, it seemed to be the right place for me.

Bezalel university was built on the huge campus of Hebrew university in the 80s. Regarding the political, social and economical circumstances, the development of this university is quite impressive. Other than the KUNI in Linz, I experienced Bezalel much more as an Institution. When we had the first meeting with the administrative team, our group of 7 photography exchange students discovered that we had only limited freedom in choosing our courses. Nevertheless I was very pleased with the quality of the teaching in general. My schedule offered a small spectrum of courses but in a variety of disciplines. We had the opportunity to learn old historical photographic procedures where the huge lab was used. There was a course with a very spiritual teacher whose lectures concerned philosophy. One course dealt with documentary photography, where we explored the working class neighbourhood Katamonim. Very recommendable is one of my favourite courses - the „making of Jerusalem“ - where the exchange students get to do tours around Jerusalem and are introduced to historical backgrounds. Also the street photography course („learning to see“) for exchange students really influenced me and my work profoundly. Nearly all of my courses were held entirely in english for the sake of us foreigners. One of the best things about the Bezalel photography department is probably the big end of the year exhibition where a group of teachers discusses every piece of work for thirty minutes. In the interaction with teachers I always felt at eye level, respected and heard. I got very useful feedback and advice from my mentors and I must say that I made a big step in my progression as an artist.

- about the staying (culture / accommodation / food/ transport/ living costs/ language)

I came to Jerusalem about one month before the semester started to settle down and get used to the new environment. Looking back I feel that I really needed this time in advance because the city itself is so overwhelming. In the beginning I had difficulties understanding the invisible borders, implicit dresscodes and manners of acting and speaking. Being a very careful person in that sense, I was anxious to not offend anyone. But with experience comes confidence and after a month of intense conversations, a lot of research and just being thrown into the cold water, I finally got comfortable with my temporary home.

Also finding a room in Jerusalem took me some time since I've been recommended not to move to the dorms. Both spaces I lived in I found on facebook - the first one for a short period in the beginning to look for something permanent. The price for the big room I stayed in for four and a half months, located in city center was 2000NIS not including bills. That's about the average price for rent in this scale. The living costs in general are very high in Israel.

It's pretty surprising that although Jerusalem is still a divided city, the mentality on both sides can be described as much more open and warm compared to Europe. It's very easy to meet new people and I made really good Israeli and Palestinian friends during my stay.

Living in Jerusalem in terms of politics wasn't easy. The conflict encumbers life in general and also influences daily life interactions. My attempt to understand this complex situation drove me into many, sometimes very emotional discussions.

All in all I can say that Jerusalem definitely was a great challenge for me. Israel is a country of contrasts and so was my experience. Dealing with questions of ethics, cultural identity, religion, history and archeology my semester was full of eye-, mind- and heart-opening discoveries. I am very grateful for this profound experience.

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