

**Saint-Petersburg State University**  
**International Relations Office**

## EXCHANGE STUDENTS' REPORT

Please complete this form and send it to Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept.  
nechaeva@ir.pu.ru, fax +7 /812/ 3240788. Thank you.

**TO BE FILLED OUT ELECTRONICALLY**

The international experience you have gained while the exchange period at St.Petersburg University is the unique practice you will remember all your life. It can also help other students when they are planning for their exchange. To make sure that prospective students have a chance to learn from your experience you are required to submit the **Exchange Students` Report**.

Please complete the form and **return by email to [nechaeva@ir.pu.ru](mailto:nechaeva@ir.pu.ru)**.

When filling in the returned student report try to remember the sort of things that you wanted to know before you went on exchange, be honest in your responses and try to avoid simply giving yes/no answers.

Please do not hesitate to contact Scientific and Academic Cooperation/Students Exchange Dept. staff if there are any issues you would like to discuss regarding your exchange experience.

<b>Name:</b>	Mauro Clerici
<b>Host faculty at SPSU</b>	School of International Relations
<b>Exchange Study Period</b>	18/02/2009 - 17/08/2009
<b>Home Institution</b>	University of Bologna
	Department of Political Science

Do you give permission for prospective exchange students to contact you if they have questions? **YES**

If yes, please give your preferred email address: Mauro.clerici@gmail.com

## The Host University

What factors influenced your decision to select St.Petersburg State University?

My interest in the European-Russian relations was the main factor that influenced my decision to study at the St. Petersburg State University.

How would you describe St.Petersburg State University?

Is a well organized place to study. At the campus of the main building you can find the different facilities.

Please describe the location of St.Petersburg State University (both Faculty and Administration building)

Administration building: is located on Vasilevsky Ostrov, not far from metro station Vasilestrovskaja. It is inside the main building campus where you will find all the services related with your registration and visa procedures.

Faculty: I attended to the international exchange programme at the School of International relations located in Smolny at the end of Nevsky prospekt. Is an wonderful ancient building with and efficient office for international students. There is a computer room and a free wi-fi internet connection. The only negative point is that is located very far from the main building and from the dormitories (approximately 1 hour of bus from the dormitory). As it is one of the most prestigious faculty of the city, the canteen is very expensive and the price/quality ratio of the food is low.

Please describe the courses that you took while on exchange? What were their pros and cons?

European-Russian relations: the course is full of contents and the professor is well prepared. It gives the opportunity to understand the institutional differences between the European and the Russian decision makers bodies.

European-Russian security: during the course we took into consideration different case studies such as South Ossetia, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia etc.. analyzing the point of view of Russia, EU and USA, the military, diplomatic and legal approach used by the different powers; the repercussion that the interventions had in terms of international relations.

Russian foreign policy in the XX century: starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> world war, the period between the two world wars, the cold war, the detente, the end of the cold war and the dissolution of USSR, the course analyzes the evolution of Russian foreign policy during the last century.

Cold war: the course is mainly based on the analysis of documents, correspondence, declarations of the leaders and political actors that participated to main events of the cold war; its beginning, the crisis, the detente and the end.

Russian History: starting from the 13<sup>th</sup> century the course aimed to provide an overview of the Russian History since its embryonal status up to the current day. For me, this course was extremely important in order to understand the evolution of political and social status of Russia and to better comprehend the changes that are occurring in this historical period.

Did you take Russian language course? If so please describe its pros and cons?

Russian courses for international students are for free. They are provided by the host faculty that is subcontracting the organization of the courses to the faculty of philology. For some unknown and unexplained reasons the students participating to the Erasmus Mundus exchange are supposed to pay a high fee in order to attend to the course. Before taking a decision I asked to the responsible which are the differences between the free and not for free one course (recognition of level, ECTS credits etc.) and they replied me that there are no differences, at the end I would get just a general certification of attendance. However, as I got the permission to attend to the course by my host faculty, I had 3 month Russian course for free but at the end I didn't get the certification of attendance by the faculty of philology because the person in charge (Mr. Shatilov) told me that I attended to the class illegally. I contacted the international relations office of the host faculty in order to ask explanation and they reply me that there is no reason to don't obtain the certification. Moreover they told me that the only courses that preview a fee are the once that ends with a final exam and a recognitions of fluency level (A1 to C2). Up to today I didn't get any certification.

Making exception to all those organization problems, the course was very useful and well organized. The teacher used modern teaching methodology and he took care mainly on communicative skills.

Did you find the academic staff helpful?

Professors were very kindly and very useful in helping me to find information for my academic research.

Did you find the international office staff helpful?

University: the Erasmus Mundus programme is very new; we were the first undergraduate students attending to the programme at the St. Peterburg State university so also the staff was not always ready to answer to our needs but the person in charge (Miss. Maryia Nechaeva) always demonstrate attention to our situation and did her best efforts to solve any problem occurred even during the most difficult situation. Once I had problems with my visa extension procedure and the intervention of the international office helped to solve the situation very promptly.

Please describe the resources available to exchange students (ie computers, the library)?

As I stated before, at my host faculty there is a computer room with internet connection and a free wi-fi connection. In the campus of the main building there is a library with a lot of literature in English and German languages located in the structure of the German-european studies centre.

Did you experience any language or cultural difficulties at St.Petersburg State University?

All the staff at the international office speak English but I experienced difficulties with the visa office. In that office there is just one person that speaks English and I was requested to fill in a quite complicate document. My suggestion is to take the documents with you and ask for help to the international relation office or to some foreign student that speaks well Russian. Leave your country with 10 photos for documents (**format: 3x4 cm, black and with or color, matt background**), you will need them for all the documents. The legislation about visa is changing very often, so I can't give you any advise; however you will be required to make a HIV test, so if if you have done it in your country **don't bring with you because is not valid in Russia, you will be required to have a Russian one.** I had difficulties also at the office for internet registration, the staff doesn't speak English and the procedure to obtain an internet connection at the dormitory is as well complex and quite expensive. Generally I can say that outside of the international office, if you don't speak Russian, the best way to deal with the other structures of the University is to ask for help to some Russian student; usually they are very polite and happy to help you. I can't say the same for the bureaucrats of the different offices (except the IR office), they are regardless and they don't make much efforts to help if you don't speak Russian.

Do you think that going on exchange contributed to your academic development? If so, how?

Definitely yes, as I stated before all the course I attended to were very interesting and gave a important contribution in my understanding of European-Russian relations.

## Practical

### Accommodation

Please describe the accommodation options available to exchange students. What were their pros and cons?

The international relations office provides a place at one of the dormitory. The decision on the location depends by the host faculty. My dormitory was located on Vasilevskji Ostrov in Ul. Schevchenko. The canteen is very good in terms of quality/prize rate. There is a very cheap laundry inside. Nobody at the administration speak English except the accountant. In my opinion there are 4 constraint:

- It is near the main building (15 minuts by bus) but very far from my faculty (1 to 2 hours).
- the dormitory is closing at 1.00 am and it opens at 6.00 am so you have to take into consideration the timing when you go out.
- During the second half of April until September the bridges that connect the island whit the center of the city are open during the night so whenever you are in the center you have to take into consideration the opening timing of the bridges.
- Internet (as I wrote before for the IP there is an office at the main building) at the dormitory is very expensive because the computation is based on download MB.

Another option is to take a room in a apartment with other students or worker. This option is more expensive but gives you more freedom and the possibility to get more in contact with the Russian normal way of life.

How expensive were the accommodation options?

Dormitory:

Overnights: 3380 Rubles per month (depending on the exchange rate, between 70-75 Euro)

Internet: 1800 Rubles per month (for normal use, mail, youtube, with no downloading, about 40 Euro)

Laundry: about 1000 Rubles per month (about 20 Euro).

TOTAL: about 6200 Rubles per month (about 140 Euro)

Apartment (single room in a shared apartment):

Rent: between 8.000 and 14.000 Rubles (170-320 Euro) all inclusive (bills, internet, expenses). The price depends from location and typology of apartment.

What type of accommodation would you recommend?

As I explained before, the apartment gives more freedom so I would recommend you to find a room in the city center to avoid any kind of restriction to your freedom of movement. I would suggest to stay at the dormitory for the first period, so you don't have to think about accommodation and once you get confidence with the city and solve your visa troubles you can start to search for an apartment. The public transport system in St. Petersburg is very efficient and capillary but during the day there is a lot of traffic (12-14 and 18-20 are the worst period of time) and all kind of transportation are out of service between 12.00 and 5.00 am. For the above-mentioned reason if you choose to stay in a apartment I would recommend you to find a place near to your faculty or on the mid way between the faculty and the main building. I would suggest you the following web service: <http://flatmates.ru/eng/>

Using this service I found a room at 10500 rubles all inclusive very near to my faculty in one week. It is used by Russian students and foreigners, both students and workers, is very detailed and most of information are available in English. If you speak Russian or have the possibility to be helped by a Russian speaker you can also consult local newspapers. Also on [easyroommate.com](http://easyroommate.com) you can find different option but the site is not well done and most of the information are in Russian.

### Food

Was food expensive?

Food is absolutely not expensive if you buy in supermarkets or "Produkti" (little supermarket where you can find food, cigarettes and alcoholics). Supermarkets are usually open until 9 or 11 p.m. (depend from the location, in the centre they stay open later) and a lot Produkti are open 24 per day.

Where is the best place to shop?

For every day shop see the previous chapter. If you want to buy big quantities you can go to

Metro or Lenta reachable by public transportation. If you miss some traditional products of your country you can go in the supermarket in front of Dostojevskaya metro station, it is very expensive!!!

How much does it cost to eat out at a local restaurant/café?

On Nevsky Prospekt there are many restaurants but I would avoid those because they are expensive but the quality of food and service is very low. Here below a list of places with a good quality/price rate:

- on Valisevsky Ostrov, very close to the dormitory, there is a nice Georgian restaurant in Gavanskaya ulitsa (I think number 41), price for a complete lunch with a beer: 400 - 500 Rubles. They have also a menu in English but the waiter speaks just in Russian.
- in the city centre, near Metro Station Ploshchad Vosstaniya, in Nekrasova ulitsa, in front of the pub "The Beer House" there is another very nice Georgian restaurant, price: 400-500 Rubles for a complete lunch. They don't have the menu in English but there is a waiter that speaks good English.
- In Mytininskaya ulitsa near to the cross with 8<sup>th</sup> Sovetskaja ulitsa there is a good and very cheap Chinese restaurant "Kitaj Gorod", menu in English and waiters speak a little bit of English, price: 250 - 400 Rubles (business lunch at 160 Rubles).
- In 5<sup>th</sup> Sovetskaja ulitsa on the cross with Suvorovskiy Prospekt there is a nice fast food with a lot of Russian Traditional plates called "U Natashi" (At Natasha's), menu just in Russian and waiters speak just Russian but on the menu there are pictures of each plate!!!. Price: 250 - 400 Rubles.
- If during the lunch time you are around the main building of the university and don't want to deal with the chaos of the canteens, on the cross between Filologicheskij pereulok and Universitetskaya naberezhnaya there is a good restaurant (normally very expensive) that provides business lunch for 250 Rubles. There are many places in the city that provides the same kind of arrangement.
- If you want to eat Sushi there are many chain (such as Dve Palocke, Evrazia etc.), menu in English, price: 400-800 rubles.

AND NOW THE HIGH QUALITY!!!:

- International Kitchen: if you need a place for some "special occasion", in Bolshaya morskaya ulitsa 45 is located a very nice (and quite expensive!!!) restaurant with a "International Kitchen", they have menu both in Russian and English and the staff speak different languages (English, French, Spanish, German). The price for a complete meal is from 600 to 1000 Rubles. It is better to book before: tel: 570-1974
- Another very nice place to eat is the French restaurant "Jean Jaques Rousseau" in Pushkinskaya ulitsa. Price: 500-900 rubles. In this street there are also several nice cafe.
- If you want to eat Sushi but you don't like chains, be ready to spend some money at those original Japanese Sushi restaurant: "Asahi" in Moskovskij prospekt 206 and Karavannaya ulitsa 5A just besides the metro station Moskovskaya, price 500-700 Rubles. If you have about 35-50 Euro budget you can also go to "Schogun" in Vosstanya ulitsa 26.
- and the last one of my list is the Indian Restaurant located in the cross between Gorokhovaya ulitsa and Admiralteyskiy prospekt as well expensive but very good, price around 600-1000 rubles.

The above mentioned prices are to be considered as complete lunch with a local beer. If you order imported beer or wine the price could increase sensibly.

## **Transport**

How did you find the local transport network?

The transport network is very efficient and capillary, the only lack is that from 12.00 and 5.00 am no public transport are operative. You can also use "Gipsy taxi", illegal taxi that you can find wherever in the street of the city. The normal price for a ride in the city is about 150-200 rubles. It can be dangerous to take those taxi during the night or if you are drunk, in those situation is better to don't be alone or at least seat in the back seats of the car.

Was it expensive to use local transport?

Local transport are very cheap. A bus, trolleybus or marsrutka (private van taxi) ride is 18-25 Rubles (you can buy tickets directly on the bus) and the metro 20 Rubles (tickets at the station). However the best solution is to make the travel card that cost 300 Rubles and than 500 Rubles per month. It includes unlimited bus, trolleybus and tram transport and 70 metro rides. It excludes only marsrutka because they are belonging to private companies.

Did you have the Students Travel Card (discounts for public transport)?

Yes. Of course the procedure to obtain the Travel Card is complicate as all the other thing!!! So, first at all wait some days after your arrival because your name need to be inserted in the informatics system by the university (one week should be enough). Than go to metro station Primorskaya: behind the station, on the side of the river embankment there is a office that deals with travel cards (you well see a sign of a cafe, the office is located in the same building). Once inside you have to fill in the form and than go in the office; submit the form to the lady and she will give you a request of payment of 300 Rubles. With this form we can go in the nearest Sber Bank (there is one on the main street out of the station on the right side). Bring your passport, visa and registration with you!!! Pay the 300 Rubles to the cashier, get the receipt and go back in the office. They will make a photo and give you the card immediately. After few minutes you can go to one of the "Cassa" of metro station, give them the travel card and 500 Rubles and finally you will be able to enjoy St. Petersburg public transportation as you are Russian!!!

## **Personal Safety**

Did you find St.Petersburg safe?

The level of safety in Saint Petersburg is similar to any other European metropolis.

Did you use medical services at St.Petersburg? If yes please describe their pros and cons.

Personally I didn't use medical services in St. Petersburg but a friend of mine used it. Also for the staff of international office was a new experience so in the beginning it was quite complicate to understand the procedure and how to deal. We faced several problems:

- we didn't know where to go, so if you are in such a situation inform immediately your coordinator and ask the location of the nearest student's clinic.
- Once we arrived at the student's clinic they told that my friend was not subscribed in the sanitary system but after a little discussion the nurse made the subscription, so I suggest you to make this procedures preventively as soon as you arrive in St. Petersburg.
- In the clinic (while making the subscription) and later in the hospital, the medical staff was asking for the insurance; our insurance ticket was in English that created complications. I would suggest for the future to ask for a document with the translation in Russian.
- On the insurance number there is a Bruxelles number to be contacted in case of emergency; this created other complications. Two day after I discover that there is a branch office of the insurance in Moscow so I would strongly recommend to demand to the insurance in Bruxelles to indicate the Moscow number on the document (and as I wrote before the translation of the document in Russian).
- The insurance was supposed to act as intermediate between the hospital and the customer but they didn't. Fortunately our coordinator (Miss Mariya Nechaeva) played this role calling the doctors and than reporting us in English.
- I would suggest also to inform your embassy if you are in hospital.

However, once solved all those organizational and bureaucratic problems, the assistance provided by the medical staff was accurately and efficient.

Do you have any safety advice for other exchange students?

Avoid to going around alone in the suburban areas during the night and respect all the safety measures that you would respect in any European metropolis. Try to avoid contacts with police, they can make you loosing time. If they stop you, tell them that you are a student, don't give them any document unless they don't ask. In any case is better to go around with a copy of documents in stand of originals; ask to the international office for a stamp on the copies and for advise about this issue. Keep the emergency number of your embassy always with you!!! As I wrote before, avoid to take "Gipsy taxi" alone during the night especially if you are not sober and if you have to use them, remember to seat in the back seats!!! Otherwise you can also use an official taxi, there are not many and they are more expensive. I suggest you this company: Taxi068; tel: 324 7777; sometimes you can find also people speaking in English; is not expensive and drivers are professional. Is a good idea to use an official taxi for exemple when you need to move to/from the airport during the night: the cost of the ride is between 500-700 Rubles depending from the location.

## Social

### Life on Exchange

How would you describe the way of life in Russia and in St.Petersburg in particular?

Did you experience 'culture shock'?

I am coming from a Mediterranean country so I am used to deal in everyday life with with a warm approach. In Russia people are not always warm; for example is normal to enter in a shop and nobody asking you if you need something or people not doing any effort to explain or understand you if you don't speak Russian.

Do you have any suggestions on how to cope with 'culture shock'?

What I stated before is the average man Russian way to deal, especially with foreigners; but after few month I get used to this kind of approach and I learned who to deal with them. I understood that at the end Russian are polite and ready to help you but you have first to destroy the barrier of suspiciousness between you and them. Try to be polite and cold at the same time, don't give up if you need something, show them that you are able to get angry if there is necessity, and you will obtain always what you need!!!.

What is the best way to meet people?

I think the best way is to travel.

Do you have any suggestions on what to do on the weekend?

If you like clubbing, St. Petersburg offer you a lot of choice but here I decided to give you some alternatives:

- First at all you should do a dacia experience; I been to dacia several times because I was invited by a Russian friend of mine. If you are not lucky to find somebody that invites you, you can always rent a dacia, ask to some Russian student to help you.
- Another think that you have to do is the banya experience; in St. Petersburg there are several places but the best and more traditional one is: "Mytninskaya Banya" located in Mytninskaya ulitsa 17-19; from Mytninskaya ulitsa go inside the yard, you will see the banya on the right side; the first door is the "common banya" the second one is the private one. The private cost is between 1100 and 1800 per hour; I been there several times in group of 5-8 people and is a nice way to spend a Sunday afternoon when the weather is cold.
- You have to go to Pushkin to visit the Catherina park and palace. Is not far away from St. Petersburg, get on metro station Moskovskaya and than go in the big square with fountain, on the right corner you will see a lot of yellow mashrutka, they are leaving to Pushin every 15 minuts, it take half an hour.
- Vyborg: take a train (eletricka) from Finland station, the trip take 3 hours; is a small city so you don't need to stay there to sleep, just leave Petersburg in early morning.
- Peterhoff: during the summer time a tajekt is leaving from the port on Neva in front of Ermitage.
- Veliki Novgorod.

### Travel

Did you travel before, after or during your exchange?

I travelled near in the above mentioned places during my exchange and in the last period I travelled around Russia. I been in Moscow, Vladimir, Suzdal, Nizhny Novgorod and I am planning to go to Rostov, Astrakhan, Volgograd, Samara, Yekaterininburg and than way back to Petersburg. I will update you with all information about my travels, places to sleep and advises at the end of my trip!!!!

What would you advise to travellers?

TRAINS:  
After 5 month in Russia I am able to speak some Russian but still buying train tickets is one of the most difficult think!!!! So if you have a Russian speaking friend bring him with you!!! Otherwise you can write

the requested tickets on a piece of paper. For long trips is convenient to use night trains, you can sleep and they are much cheaper. Use the Platskarny solution if available (it is a open cabin where you can sleep) With this solution for example the cost of a night train leaving St. Petersburg at 1.00 am and arriving in Moscow at 10.00 am is about 800 Rubles.

## **Highlights**

Briefly describe the highlights of your exchange experience

## **Problems**

Briefly describe any problems you experienced on exchange and any suggestions you may have to help others avoid them.

I wrote all the problem I incurred in the report, so here below I will just make a list, than please refer to the single chapters:

- visa
- health assistance, insurance
- internet
- Russian language course
- Police
- Taxi

## **Other Comments**

Do you have any further comments?

Thank you for taking the time to share your exchange experiences in this report.

Please save your report as a **Word document** and email a copy to [nechaeva@ir.pu.ru](mailto:nechaeva@ir.pu.ru)

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

The idea and the model of this form is taken from the University of South Australia web pages.