

**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 [incoming@ir.pu.ru](mailto:incoming@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>	Ulrike Stephan
<b>Host faculty at SPSU</b>	Faculty of Geography and Geoecology
<b>Exchange Study Period</b>	09/2009 - 01/2010
<b>Home Institution</b>	University of Potsdam, Germany
	Department of Geography

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

If yes, please give your preferred email address:           ulli267@web.de

## The Host University

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

Since Russian Studies have been my minor subject in Potsdam, the decision for a Russian university was more than obvious. I chose St. Petersburg State University because of its good reputation and the possibility to study my main subject, Human Geography, there.

How would you describe St.Petersburg State University?

St. Petersburg State University is one of the oldest universities in Russia. Many famous public characters have studied there. Today everything is changing. Some of the faculties have already adapted themselves to the new situation. Some faculties seem to have problems. At the moment many faculty buildings are being restored.

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

The Administrative building is located next to the River Neva in the center of St. Petersburg. At first, it was hard for me to orientate myself on the main campus. But after a while I got used to the location. The building of the Faculty of Geography and Geoecology is easy to reach from the metro station "Vasileostrovskaya".

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

During the exchange period I attended three lectures, which were held in Russian. One lecture was about city planning and city development. It did not meet my expectations, but nevertheless it was interesting to get to know the Russian point of view. Another lecture gave an introduction into "Economic Geography of Russia". The best lecture focused on "Local Geography and History of St. Petersburg and its Region". The university lecturer made the students feel that she really loves the town. Furthermore, three excursions through St. Petersburg were part of the program.

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

As a supplement to the lectures at the Faculty of Geography and Geoecology, I took Russian language course. At first I was not too happy with the grouping, since there have been some students in my group who were at a lower level. But after a while I could benefit from vocabulary and grammar training. Especially the role plays helped me to match difficult situations.

Did you find the academic staff helpful?

Yes, the academic staff was always very kind and helpful.

Did you find the international office staff helpful?

Yes, of course. Especially the "Orientation Meeting" in the beginning of the exchange period gave me a lot of answers to open questions. And without the international office staff, the application for multi visa would have been much more difficult.

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

Libraries and computer classes are available at every faculty. I mainly used WIFI on the main campus and in the building of my faculty.

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

I did not really experience language or cultural difficulties, although I could not take part in most of the exams, because I went home for Christmas...

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

I guess, going on exchange contributed to my academic development. By now, it is not easy to say in which way, but I think that it will primarily help me to write my master's thesis.

## **Practical**

### ***Accommodation***

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

There are two accommodation options available to every exchange student. On one hand, exchange students can live in the student's dormitory. This is the cheaper option, but sometimes it is difficult to concentrate on studying, while there are room mates, who want to party. Furthermore, in some cases all room mates are also foreigners... On the other hand, exchange students have the possibility to live on their own or with a guest family, rent a room or a flat. In this case, there is a chance to get to know the Russian way of living.

How expensive were the accommodation options?

Single rooms in St. Petersburg are quite expensive. Compared to this I had to pay only about 3500 rubles per month for a place in the student's dormitory.

What type of accommodation would you recommend?

I do not regret my decision to choose the student's dormitory. Although all my room mates were also Germans, I had enough possibilities to get in contact with Russian native speakers. All in all, the student's dormitory is a good place to get to know new people.

### ***Food***

Was food expensive?

Food is almost as expensive as in Germany. And especially in the university cafés, the prices are even much higher than in Germany.

Where is the best place to shop?

The best place to shop is in some supermarkets and in the farmer store near the metro station "Primorskaya". There you get fresh fruits and vegetables as well as high quality meat.

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

Eating out in St. Petersburg is usually not as expensive as in Germany. In sushi restaurants as Japoshka or Dve Palochki you pay between 350-450 rubles for a complete meal. In the student's café you need about 150 rubles.

### ***Transport***

How did you find the local transport network?

The local transport network is well developed. It takes a while to get used to it, but after a while, you understand that the metro is a most reliable means of transport. I found it helpful to buy an atlas with all transportation routes.

Was it expensive to use local transport?

Not really. After the first month I got my Student's Travel Card.

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

Yes. I received it at the end of the first month. And then using the public transport was easy and cheap.

### ***Personal Safety***

Did you find St.Petersburg safe?

In my opinion, St. Petersburg is not more dangerous than Berlin. In any big city you should take care of your valuables and avoid leaving home alone at night.

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

As I stayed in the student's dormitory, I had to do a health certificate in the beginning of the exchange period. In this way I got to know the Russian bureaucracy, but I also realized that the university polyclinic in St. Petersburg is comparable to our polyclinics in East Germany.

Do you have any safety advice for other exchange students?

Leave all valuables you do not really need (for example: national passport, driving license, national student's card, insurance card), in your dormitory. Pay attention on your bags while using the public transport. Copy your important documents (passport, visa, registration, migration card), let them certify in the International Relations Office and take the copies always with you.

## Social

### *Life on Exchange*

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

Living in the student's dormitory made it hard for me to gain a deeper insight into Russian culture. Still I had the feeling that the working day started a bit later than in Germany and that people got their money for being at work – but not for doing good work. Furthermore Russians think that they are good at finding improvised solutions. But in this way they get rid of the view on the long term consequences of these solutions. The life in St. Petersburg does not differ too much from the life in other big cities, although it is influenced by the special climate and the social distinctions.

Did you experience 'culture shock'?

Since my room mates were also Germans, I did not really experience 'culture shock'. But sometimes it was difficult for me to arrange meetings with my Russian friends or to cope with Russian bureaucracy.

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

A good way to cope with 'culture shock' is to talk to people, who have already been to St. Petersburg before leaving the home country. Furthermore, in Germany there exists a good book with the title: "KulturShock Russland", which describes the social situation in Russia.

What is the best way to meet people?

One of the best ways to meet people is to live in the student's dormitory. Furthermore you always get to know nice people while sitting at the passport and visa department or standing in front of the office of the Vice-Dean for international relations. Of course, there are some other places at the university or in the city, where it is easy to get in contact with other people, but most of my friends I got to know at these places.

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

In the weekend, exchange students should go to museums or visit the palaces and parks in the surroundings of St. Petersburg. In addition they should try to get to know the city, go shopping, and take part in sports or cultural events. In the evening there are lots of bars and clubs for every taste available. Still most exchange students go to "Datscha" once at least.

## *Travel*

Did you travel before, after or during your exchange?

No, I did not travel during my exchange period. But I took part in an excursion to Velikiy Novgorod, which was organized by the student's organization.

What would you advise to travellers?

Find a friend who wants to travel with you!

## **Highlights**

Briefly describe the highlights of your exchange experience

In general, the five months in St. Petersburg were a great experience and so it is hard for me to identify the highlights. However, especially the time before Christmas, when me and my room-mates went to some great classical concerts and the Russian winter in the end of December and in January will always stay on my mind.

## **Problems**

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

A big problem was the temperature in the student's dormitory. Maybe the administration should replace the windows or offer additional heating.

## **Other Comments**

Do you have any further comments?

If you have the chance to go to St. Petersburg, take it. You will not regret it!

The information given in this Report CAN BE PUBLISHED on the Internet \_\_\_\_\_yes\_\_\_\_\_

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: 07.02.10 \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Ulrike Stephan \_\_\_\_\_