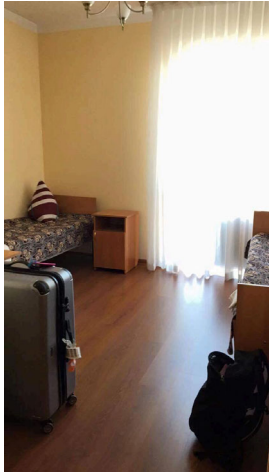


Almaty, Kazakhstan

My application for internship in Kazakhstan was the most spontaneous thing ever. At first, when I saw that Kazakhstan was the only place that I could apply for internship at, my instant reaction was “What’s the point of the internship then?” I also asked myself if it would be safe for me to go there, “but IAESTE would not send students to dangerous places, right?” Despite the fact that these were the initial thoughts that came to my mind, I still had a voice inside of me telling me that everything was just based off of prejudices, and that I should do more research. That was when my curiosity for the country grew.

I made a quick search for Almaty, Kazakhstan on Google, and it turns out that the picture that I had in my head was as wrong as it could get. They speak Russian and Kazakh. The cities looked like well-developed cities, and it is safer than many other countries in Asia. When people heard that I was going to Kazakhstan, the reaction that I got was either “are you crazy?!” or a disappointing “Oh...how come you chose Kazakhstan?”. I wanted to show these people that their picture of Kazakhstan was completely wrong.

When I arrived, a PhD student at the university that I was going to do the internship at brought me to my dormitory. My room was in a much better condition than I had ever expected! Not to mention the fancy shower!



I had the whole room for myself because there are not many students at the university during summer.

My first impression of Kazakhstan was that the buildings and the markets were similar to the buildings in the southern part of Europe (and south east Asia except Singapore) because of the conditions and how they have been maintained throughout the years. Kazakhstan was similar to Sweden because of the nature, which also affects how the buildings are built. Another thing that was similar to

Sweden was that Kazakhstan was very sparsely populated (compared to Japan and many other countries). The way that people interact with each other was very different from Sweden in the sense that strangers would talk to you. A random guy across the street could yell “Yeahh!!! Liverpool!!!” when they see your Liverpool T-shirt. In the beginning of the trip I would get really confused because I got the feeling that my supervisor knew everyone that we passed by. It turns out that that was not the case. Everyone was very nice, and people were ready to help you at any time. It was to the point where you actually felt like you were insanely rude by just being your usual self.

On the weekends IAESTE Kazakhstan would arrange trips to different places, and sometimes we (the students) would arrange our own trips along with the local students. We went to the city, travelled up the mountains, to Charyn Canyon and much more. Kazakhstan really has everything you can ever imagine! There are people of many different backgrounds as well and there were plenty of restaurants to choose from. I had my favourite Korean restaurant when I was there!



The internship was divided into two parts. First part consisted of me helping a PhD student with her catalyst research in her lab that was located in the basement of the chemistry building. We were basically doing hydrogenation over and over again. During this whole time I was very worried about her safety (and my safety) because:

1. The lab coats were NOT made of cotton (polyester coats will burn and melt and stick to your skin) and some of them were short sleeved.
2. She did not own any safety goggles, and there were none available for us to borrow or buy.
3. The equipment was very old, and it was very hard to clean. Instead of a magnetic stirrer, she used a tiny machine (unfortunately I did not get a picture of the machine) that shakes the bottle back and forth. Imagine the

sound! The bottle was taped on to the machine. After some shaking, the bottle would start leaning to one side. We had to check it frequently so that the chemicals would not be poured out accidentally.

As seen in the pictures (Figure 1), some of the chemicals were stored in water bottles or sometimes coca cola bottles. We did not have to do any risk analysis before entering the laboratory. The best part was that we were allowed to eat and drink in the lab! Yup! The lab was our place to have teatime. Honestly...I was worried about eating chemicals throughout my entire time there...



Figure 1: The lab where we did hydrogenation

Second part of the internship was spent in a laboratory that was located in another building. The equipment at the new lab was much more up to date. Our job was to find ways to maintain the properties of petroleum despite very low temperatures by adding different chemicals and using a magnetic field. This is to improve the quality when transporting the petroleum to e.g. Russia during wintertime.



This internship has taught me to be open to new things, even if it happens to involve travelling to a country that most people would restrain from visiting only

because it ends with “-*stan*”. I met lovely people during my internship period, people that I am still talking to until this day. I learned a lot about Kazakhstan’s culture and people’s many different views on life. The country is much more diverse than you would think it is, although most people are Russians or Kazakhs (who by the way have two completely different cultures). People in Kazakhstan wondered why I chose Kazakhstan because they think that they do not have much to offer; but they do! I just wish that I could make them believe that themselves as well!

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