

It is definitely not hard to go 6 years back in time when I, as a student of Environmental Protection College Velenje, received that crucial phone call from the coordinator for student exchanges at our college. It didn't take long for her to convince me of joining the student exchange in Iceland, my dream destination since childhood. The only thought against the final decision was the absence from home for 90 days. I have never been so far (3000 km) away from my family for so long. But my lust for exploring and my will to learn new things were much stronger. I would be accompanied by two of my college mates was also a positive.

The journey from our home towns all the way to the faraway island in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean was nothing less than challenging, dazzled by all the emotions of farewell, excitement but also with the feeling of fear. We changed quite a few means of transport, walked miles around the dodgy train stations and stuffy airports finding the right gates and a bench to take a nap, we finally arrived to a green, flat and fresh final destination – Iceland.

Exhausted and hungry we felt much better when we settled in our modern flat in a decent neighbourhood, our home for the next 3 months, where the wilderness is just around the corner. Actually all the city of Akureyri looked very well maintained and tidy. We were surprised by the majority of English speaking people. Even the 8 or 80 year olds would know at least 'hello' and 'thank you'.

After a quick check out of the city and gathered essential food supplies it was about a time to meet the staff from The School for Renewable Energy Science where we attended 2 week course called Energy Systems and Policies. It was a higher level of the knowledge we had gained from the past schooling hence we struggled a bit to understand all the complex words and formulas but with the unselfish help of fellow students of all kinds of nationalities studying became bearable. Later on we joined a class at University of Akureyri (UNAK). We met our supervisor Dr Orlygsson who was as kind and helpful as the rest of the professors and students. The "International day" at UNAK, one of the many student events, left us even more surprised about the diversity of students who originated from across the Europe all the way to Canada and even China. Lucky enough we got the chance at our Icelandic nature class to go for a fishing trip right to the sea with a real fishing boat and experienced captain. Each student got an opportunity to try to catch a fish, also the dirty work – if you want the dinner you have to clean the fish. The real highlight of the freezing day as fishermen was seeing the majestic but surprisingly shy whales feeding only few metres from us.

All the knowledge of Icelandic nature and animals, renewable energy and Icelandic language getting stuffed into our brains in short period of time made us thirsty for exploring the surroundings and also the storied, hidden distant places across the island of fire and ice. We did a big one day trip heading west and then north of Akureyri. Every driven mile was showing geological wealthy of this country. Amazed by hot springs with exploding thermal water, outstanding beauty of nature reserves with hundreds of lakes and on the other side vast inhabited land of black lava stone we could not wait for our first proper Icelandic dinner with authentic cod fish. On the way back home it was just a matter of time before bumping into a troll – the famous creature from Icelandic mythology. Everything is possible, is it not?

With the help of our mentor Dr Johan I managed to do my own project which included setting the test tubes around the city for the purpose of measurement the certain gases in the air. The goal of the project was to compare the air pollution between Akureyri and home town Velenje.

Fast paced student life and modern technology of facetimeing applications alleviated the separation form the home environment. With my curiosity and open mindedness I created a few friendships with wonderful people of different nations that will never be forgotten. This kind of experience opens your eyes a little bit more, fulfil you with joy and hope to do it again and again. At different time, at different place, with new people. My advice to any student deciding whether to exchange or not, DO IT. Do not think too much. With a little budget of yours and with a helping budget of the organisation (in my case EEA) you will gain a lifetime experience that will leave you rich inside your head and soul. No one can take that away from you.

My experience of student exchange abroad proved me the greatness of love to my family and home. I also learned I can trust myself alone. It gave me a confidence of how much am I as a person capable of. Boundaries exist only in our heads.