



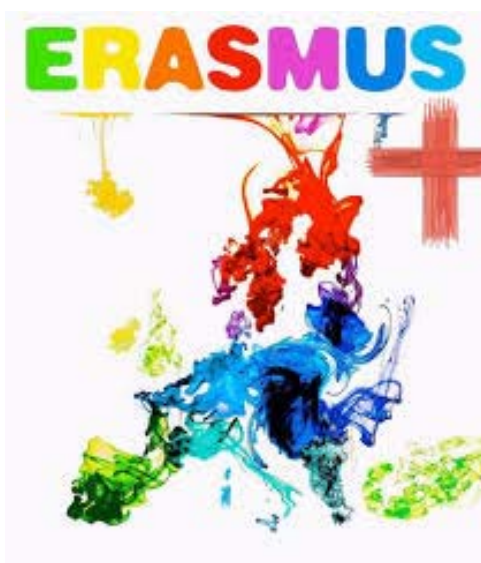
SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR ERASMUS STUDENTS

How to survive and make your experience much better
in Turkey
in Muğla
at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University
as an Erasmus exchange student

by *Štěpánka Blažejová* from Czech Republic
(former Erasmus student and current resident in Muğla, Turkey)

Erasmus experience is so much more than just an exchange program. It's a lifestyle, it's a new experience, it's a lifetime opportunity, and it's a Hollywood movie in which you are starring!

And this is a guide to help you explore the setting: Turkey in general and Muğla in particular!



Turkey is a place you need to visit and Erasmus is the best option/opportunity to do this. It's indeed a great choice to enjoy your Erasmus.

This little guide opens up few tips and information that should help you to have an idea about what to expect. It can also help you to make your new temporary Turkish life easier. And I will give you few more advice on how to make the best of your Erasmus at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University.

This is something I wrote from my own experience of being an Erasmus student here, five years ago. And on top of it, I added some practical experience as I have permanently lived in Akyaka, Muğla for almost three years!

Let's begin!

Before you come



You have been accepted by Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University in TURKEY and your relatives and friends might be panicking and getting anxious about where you are going.

“What an exotic country did you choose?”

“Is it safe? Are you going to be OK there?”

“They will cover you in a headscarf and you won't be allowed to leave the house!”

“You will have to grow moustache if you want to be respected part of the society.”

“They will exchange you for a camel!”



Classical stereotypes...

But don't worry, especially south west of Turkey is a highly developed place. If it is your first visit of Turkey, you will be nicely surprised about how “European-like” it is. So calm everyone down around you. You will be in safe hands in here!



Where to live in Muğla

There are definitely enough options: City centre, Kötekli campus area, Akyaka. But if I were you I would go for private apartments in Akyaka! [Akyaka](#) is a beautiful coastal town by the sea. You can find nice apartments for reasonable prices.



Let me tell you the advantages of living in Akyaka.

- It is a nice, cosy, small town with no traffic, no crowds (except for high season from June till September)
- Most of your new Erasmus friends will probably stay here
- Anytime you want, you can just go swimming in the sea or in the Azmak river, which is a real nature beauty)
- Many people around can speak English (as they are used to having many foreigners around)
- It is a touristic place so you won't feel uncomfortable in almost any situation
- If you are an active person then you will have various options to do something:
 - sea kayaking,
 - riding a bike (there are two bike rental places)
 - paragliding (from Sakar Tepesi, right above Akyaka)
 - everyday swimming
 - kitesurfing (a bit expensive)



The only disadvantage might be commuting to school every day. But it's only 25 minutes by bus which runs every half an hour.

[Kötekli](#) on the other hand, is a student town right next to the university campus. Students live either in the dormitories or they rent private apartments. Kötekli is full of Turkish students.

What to pack

Are you standing above your empty suitcase and intensively thinking how you can possibly pack everything for 4-5 months without missing anything? No panic! You can buy almost anything in Turkey (except for very specific things that are only in your country). Here is a list of recommendations about some items that previous Erasmus students forgot to take or they did not need to pack at all!

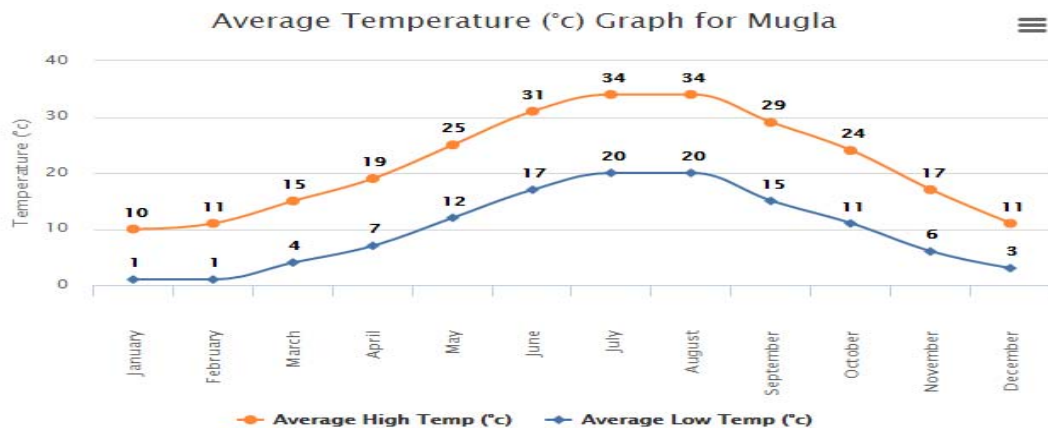


- There is no need to buy any **cosmetics** (as shampoos, shower gels, etc.) Maybe you won't find your favourite brand in Akyaka but if you do your shopping in Muğla I am sure you can find almost everything! The prices are pretty much the same.
 - I think every experienced Erasmus student from the past would recommend you to buy some **alcohol**, as taxes on alcohol are very high here.
 - If you are a sporty, active person and want to travel around, you should bring a nice backpack so you can comfortably pack everything in for few days and travel around.
 - Do not forget beach package - **bikini or swimwear**. You will definitely need it! Maybe a beach towel.
 - Don't forget your **documents and important cards** - e.g. driving licence (in case you rent a car), ID card, credit cards, and passport! Take a copy of all of them and keep it with you (just in case you lose it).
 - If you have any medical problems, don't forget to take your own specific **medicine**. Of course, there is a pharmacy in every village where you can get absolutely everything and it's much cheaper than in Germany or Austria. But if you bring your own medicine, then you know how it works and you can use it immediately.
 - You will need good **boots**. It rains a lot. There are many shops in Mugla where you can also buy a pair. (There is even Deichmann here)
 - You will need your **camera** for sure. There are so many picturesque places to take beautiful photos.
 - You don't need to pack too much **clothes**. I am sure (especially with girls) you will do some shopping here as the clothing is cheaper. And there is a washing machine in every apartment so you can wash it anytime you need. All students are facing this problem at the end of their Erasmus: "How can I pack all the clothes I brought and bought?"
 - Even you are thinking you are going to live in a hot country, weather can be quite cold in winter time. So, you will need a warm winter coat or jacket. It rains a lot in December, January, and February. But you can cheaply buy great umbrellas here.
 - If you are addicted to pork, pork sausages, bring them with you. There is no chance to buy it here! (On the other hand there is so much other nice food you can try!)
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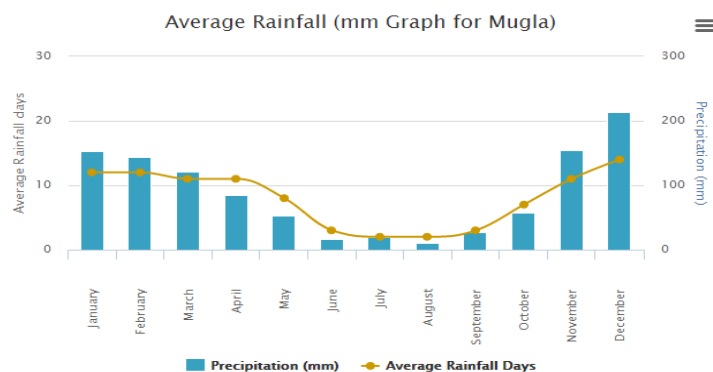
Weather in Mugla region:

Weather in Mugla region of Turkey, is much nicer and warmer than in many European countries. It's very hot in summer months (June to September). It rains a lot in winter months. I would say it's something like an English winter, drizzling and unpleasant. But temperature doesn't go below zero almost at all. There can be beautiful sunny days in winter as well.

Keep in mind that other regions of Turkey have very different weather conditions.



Average Rainfall for Mugla, Turkey



Currency

Turkish currency is Turkish Lira and TL/TRY is the symbol.
1 euro = 3,10 TRY (December 2015 - approx.)

You can withdraw your money from any ATM. There are many bank machines almost everywhere, so you will never have problem with that. You can also exchange your money at the post office or banks.



What to eat

Turkish cuisine is largely the heritage of Ottoman cuisine, which can be described as a fusion of Central Asian, Caucasian, Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and Balkan cuisines.

Turkish people love breakfast. It is the most important meal of the day. It can easily last hours. It's so delicious! You definitely have to try it in any restaurant serving breakfast.

Turkish cuisine offers various gamut of food. Everyone finds something that he loves.



You may want to check this site with recommendations about top 20 Turkish food to try: <http://www.rantlifestyle.com/2014/02/17/top-20-turkish-foods-must-try/>

There are definitely some meals you **must try**:

Iskender kebab, döner kebab, pide, köfte (meatballs), kahvaltı (Turkish breakfast) balık ekmek (fish in a bread), lahmacun (Turkish pizza), mantı (something like ravioli, but completely different taste), baklava (very sweet), börek, simit (for breakfast) and black tea, ayran (for drinks)



Where to eat

There are several options for eating. Below places are absolutely anywhere and everywhere. They offer typical Turkish cuisine or international food. Don't worry, you will not be starving here!

- Normal **restaurant** where you can find pasta, pizza, steaks, etc.
 - **Lokanta** is a cheaper restaurant usually for locals. There is no menu, you can choose from what you see (which is good for you since with no Turkish 😊 you just point at the food that looks good and eat it). They usually serve mummy food.
 - **Fast food** - even in Turkey you can fill your stomach with all the McDonalds, Burger King food.
 - **School canteens** - when you are in the university campus, you will have countless number of options of where to eat. And the food is delicious!
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Where to do shopping

- You can buy here everything you need. I haven't come across anything that I urgently needed and couldn't find (except for pork products, some products special to countries)
- There are four supermarkets in Akyaka where you can buy almost all you need (BİM, Şok, Carrefour Mini, Migros Jet). If you need maybe something more specific, you can definitely find it in big supermarkets in Muğla; Kipa (Turkish Tesco) or Carrefour or Migros.
- There are also small corner shops which are open 24/7
- If you shop for vegetable, fruit, fish, cheese, olive and homemade products, you can do it at the daily city markets (Pazar), which is the best choice because everything is fresh, cheaper. Bargaining (or haggling) is sometimes part of the experience. You will love it. There is a small food market in Akyaka on Wednesdays and a bigger market is in Gökova on Saturdays. The biggest one is in Mugla on Thursdays and Sundays.
- I am sure you will enjoy shopping for all those lovely small presents that will be reminding you of Turkey.



Internet

I am sure you want to be in touch with your family and friends back in your hometown. No worries. There is internet connection in your apartments. It doesn't always work perfectly so don't expect super connection all the time. I would recommend you to download Skype so you can be easily in touch with everyone. Do not forget to download it in advance also to your parents' computer ☺ When you register at the university you will also get a user name to be able to use Wi-Fi connection on the university campus, which is called Eduroam. Also, every cafe, restaurant, bar provides Wi-Fi internet connection so you can just ask for the password. Turkish people are addicted to their phones and to all social media applications so they need to be connected all the time. (For better communication with your Erasmus friends and also many new Turkish friends I would recommend you to download What's App to your phone. Everyone is using it here)

Good to know about the culture



- Most travellers comment on the friendliness and hospitality of the Turkish people. It really is exceptional! I have never experienced anything like this. Turkish people are known to be very hospitable; they might invite you to their houses and share the meal with you even if they don't know you. There is a saying in Turkey that goes "Stranger at the doorstep is the God's guest".

- Sometimes you might even feel insecure if unknown people invite you for tea to their houses. But anyway be careful and keep your eyes peeled! Not all people have the best intentions. It is the same all over the world.
- Friends and relations greet each other with either one or two kisses on the cheek. Elders are always respected by kissing their right hand and then placing the forehead onto the hand.
- Turkish people are very friendly and they always hug and kiss when they meet. I still haven't got used to it 😊 Turkish people keep much smaller personal space. It's normal that they get closer to you than you would like.



- Turkish people are quite nationalistic and they have their hero: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who established the modern Republic of Turkey and changed the country for better. His statues and pictures are absolutely everywhere.

- Because Turks are very patriotic you can hardly hear them talking badly about their country. Being such patriots also means that they see their country flag as a holy object, which is why it can be seen everywhere.



- Barbers and hairdresser - I would recommend every men to visit a barber shop here. It's a great experience to get a good haircut, a clean shave in a professional way for little money. There is a barber in almost every street. It is the same with hairdressers. Turkish women look after themselves a lot and they go to hairdressers' more often than any other nationality I guess. You can have your hair done, your manicure, pedicure, beauty stuff, make-up etc. They do take care of you a lot there!

- Turkish people have always enough time to drink their tea and have a little chat with people around.
- If you want to solve your problems in Turkey (talking about bureaucracy and paper work), be patient. It usually takes longer than you would expect.
- Turkish people put family and relatives before everything. Family members meet in every occasion and every single family member is supported without questions.
- Just like any other developed country, modern Turks wear casual dresses in Western style. It's normal to have wear shorts and tops, especially in Mugla region and touristic places. The further you travel to the east the more you should be respectful and maybe a bit more careful about your choice of clothes.
- If you are non-smoker there might be few situations when you don't feel very pleasant. Some Turkish people smoke right after they finish their meal. However, smoking is banned in all close areas and also hospital, school gardens, stadiums etc.



- Turkish people eat bread with everything. Natural yoghurt is similar, in a way that it accompanies most meals. Don't be surprised ☺



What to see

Turkey offers so much to see and visit. And you will have enough opportunities to explore many different parts of the country.

There are also 15 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Turkey:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_Turkey

I will just mention few places where you can get excited about in advance. These are some of those beautiful and interesting places I would highly recommend you to visit:

Hierapolis- Pamukkale: Pamukkale, meaning “cotton castle” in Turkish, is an unreal landscape famous for its white terraces. The terraces are made of travertine. People have bathed in its pools for thousands of years. The ancient Greek city of Hierapolis was built on top of the hot springs by the kings of Pergamon.



Cappadocia: It is a breathtaking nature beauty in the central Anatolia. It is best known for its unique moon-like landscape, underground cities, cave churches and houses carved in the rocks. You can do a hot-air-balloon trip to watch the sunrise, rent ATV, and do great hiking. It is possible to stay in Cave hotels to get the real atmosphere of that place.



Ephesus: One of the most beautiful ancient Greek cities. The city was famed for the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Fethiye: Beautiful coastal city of Mugla region. Ölüdeniz (Blue Lagoon), the ghost town Kayaköy, paragliding in Ölüdeniz, Butterfly Valley, Saklıkent etc.



Bodrum: A nice and lively coastal city of Mugla region. Bodrum Castle was built by the Crusaders in the 15th century as the Castle of St. Peter. It is one of the world's best preserved monuments dating back to medieval times



Mount Nemrut: Nemrut is a 2,134 meter high mountain in south-eastern Turkey, near the city of Adiyaman. In 62 BC, King Antiochus I Theos of Commagene built a tomb-sanctuary flanked by huge statues of himself, two lions, two eagles and various Greek, and Persian gods on the mountain top

Antalya and Alanya: Most popular tourist destination of Turkey

Sumela Monastery: With its stunning lonely setting, built into a cliff face, Sumela Monastery in Trabzon is the star attraction for visitors along the Black Sea coastline

Pergamum: Once home to one of the ancient world's most important libraries, Pergamum's remaining temple remnants now preside dramatically across a hilltop.

Dalyan: Ancient ruins, boat trips, mud baths and loggerhead sea turtle breeding grounds are worth seeing!

Istanbul: This biggest city of Turkey, settled on two continents, is definitely a must see. There are so many places to visit there, so one day won't be enough to see the top sights.

Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapı Palace, Basilica Cistern, Süleymaniye Mosque, Sultan Ahmet Mosque, Galata Tower, Grand Bazaar, Bosphorus Strait, Dolmabahçe Palace etc.



There are many more beautiful places but it's completely up to you which places you will visit!

I am adding a couple of links to follow and then explore in real:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/turkey/explore/>

<https://goturkey.com/en/place>



Last Word

If you really want to enjoy your stay in Turkey **stop comparing!**

Okay, so you might only be able to get something different in restaurants instead of what you ordered, people's manners might be different to what you're used to and certain things might be more expensive than they are in Tesco. But you're not in your home country anymore.

Just enjoy the things Turkey does do well and accept the way people are. You might learn something.

Once you get to know, I am sure you will fall in love with Turkey!

Contact me

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me by:

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I hope you will have a great time while you are studying at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi. And I hope Erasmus will bring great experience and unforgettable memories to your life!

Believe me! Your life will never be the same after Erasmus.

Štěpánka Blažejová
Czech Republic

