



I am doing a seven month EVS project in Iceland. I arrived here in the beginning of February and by now I have one month left here so I have seen the winter storms, some northern lights, hot summer days (about one week of it at least), lots of rocks and more sheep than people.

Iceland came to my mind some years ago by being introduced to the Icelandic music group called Sigur Ros and their beautiful movie „Heima“. I then discovered that Iceland, having a population of just 300 000 people is producing a huge amount of interesting music. Combined with the fact that on this Island you can go and walk on or around volcanoes, lava fields, black beaches, hot springs, glaciers, fjords, massive waterfalls and so on in a few days, otherwise having to basically make a trip around the world to witness all of the nature here. This makes the place special and coming from a quite simple land covered with forests and no hills in sight I knew I need to visit this country at some point in my life. Not to say the nature is plain and boring in Estonia, this is not the case for me, for example I really miss being in a forest for once, a rare sight here in Iceland but this is a different world. Perhaps I should just point out that NASA likes to come here to test out vehicles they want to send on other planets.

So, the opportunity arised and here I am. Coming here I knew I want to be around the countryside and as far away from the Reykjavik area (which is home for two thirds of the population!) as possible and it was quite easy to achieve this. The main job here is to lead workcamps of usually 8-15 international volunteers who have come here for two weeks. There are workcamps all around Iceland and I could choose the ones I liked within the first month of being here (everything could still be changed depending on what will happen over time). The camps also differ in content, from journalism/visual arts to hard physical outdoors work (planting trees, building/renovating hiking paths, cleaning the coastline/environment) . In the end I somehow managed to live in a small town in the East fjords called Eskifjörður for about four months straight, living in an old schoolhouse that has by now been donated to our organization here, renovating it, getting to know the local people and life, helping them when they need it out of my free time (for example I helped a nice guy renovate his old boat, helping the local priest do some renovation in the church, things like that) , leading the camps held there, walking around the neighbouring areas and as a custom comparable to going to the sauna in Estonia – visiting the swimming pools’ hot baths heated by geothermal energy every other day.

Indeed I am very happy with the flexibility of my hosting organization although it sometimes creates as much chaos as it does comfort. Normally people mainly live in Reykjavik, in a few common houses with all the other people doing their EVS at the time and you go and do workcamps all around Iceland, after which you have some days off to spend in the capital to have a break and relax. Instead of that I got to arrange my stay according to my needs and personality. The best thing about this was that I got to know this little town, Eskifjörður, very well, I feel like this really is my home away from home, otherwise visiting all these places for just two weeks, without really getting the rhythm of life of any specific community.

Coming here I was very sceptical about seeing myself in front of a group of 15 international volunteers and hosting them, being the person to take care and answer questions, buy all the food, make a two week workcamp schedule in a place I have never been and so on. Of course, as you might predict, these worries passed me quite fast. I was taken out of my comfort zone, put in a new place I was not really expecting and I adapted, I did my best and soon enough realized that as always, fear of the unknown never gives you the fullest in life. The confidence and skills I have acquired are very significant indeed and they came without me even noticing it, since it is all about being in the “zone“, concentrating on the now and putting myself into action. In the end the main advice to any person doing EVS, and I know this advice is common sense but still I must acknowledge its importance greatly, get out of the comfort zone, do not fight it, be flexible and if you do not like something or want to change things, do something, put in some effort, but never expect others to be as or more flexible than you, adapt.

I have made some strong connections, new friends from far away places in Europe that will be visiting me and vice versa next summer. Without a doubt I will be back here after my EVS, when and why is to be seen. EVS is an amazing opportunity, once in a lifetime much like something from a fairytale at times. Not a doubt or regret in my mind.

Sincerely from the land of ice and fire where the midnights glow and the hot springs blow, the city of smoke, Reykjavik

Martin Kullamaa, EVS in Iceland 2013

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