Studying in Irkutsk at ISU

Our first experience in ISU, 'ИГУ' in Russian language, started with a two weeks intensive Russian language course. We had lectures 3 hours a day. Although the teacher was really good we could only learn the very very basics. Two weeks of language class is definitely not enough to communicate with Russian people. Nonetheless, since it is really rare to meet someone who speaks English in Irkutsk, the obtained skills were very helpful for the following period.

Following that, we had an amazing 10 days excursion in Bolshiye Koty, a village located on the shore of Lake Baikal, which is only accessible by a ferry twice a day. There we had the opportunity to meet people from different European universities, as well as, other Russian students of ISU, who were extremely helpful during our stay in Irkutsk. Furthermore, we attended several classes from lecturers of different universities that dealt with limnology. However, the best parts of this excursion were staying in that amazing place called Lake Baikal, hiking in different places of the coastline as well as experiencing zooplankton sampling and physical measurements taken for monitoring of the lake.

Photos from Bolshiye Koty

Our actual studies here, which account for the 30 ECTS of the 3rd semester of our degree, start in the beginning of September and are completed in the end of January. We study in the Faculty of Geography that includes the following departments: Economic and Social Geography, Physical geography, Cartography and Geoinformation, Hydrology and Protection of Water Resources. All the modules are compulsory and are attended only by the students of our programme (at least for this year). We attend three theoretical and three practical modules. All the classes are quite interactive, giving us the opportunity to learn many things about the Russian culture and people's way of thinking that is an important part of environmental management studies. Furthermore, if we do well in the classes and the home assignments during the semester we can get a mark without taking an examination. However, hard work is needed during the semester since the workload is quite high. Hereafter a list with the modules along with a short description.
**Theoretical** - (Home assignments: write reports and give presentations)

1) Regional Nature Management – is about industrial activity, human resources and natural resources of different areas of the Russian federation with a focus on Irkutsk region

2) Ecological Management and Audit – is about legislation in the Russian Federation and the different codes associated with environmental protection and utilisation

3) Industrial Transport Ecology – focuses on anthropogenic pollution and possible mitigation strategies with a focus on power plants

**Practical**

1) Remote Techniques of the Earth Sensing – we use software to analyse satellite images to assess changes in land cover characteristics. Home assignments: image analysis

2) Geoinformation Technologies – we learn how to use C++ to transform different data sets and use them with GIS software. Home assignments: write programmes and write a report – Additionally: take tests during the semester

3) Computer Technologies and Statistical Methods of Ecology and Nature Management – we use different data sets to practice data analysis as well as basic statistical operations. Furthermore, we use a software to calculate atmospheric pollution levels that originate from point sources. Home assignments: data analysis.

We also need to conduct an independent research project related to environmental management. The supervisor can be a lecturer in the Faculty of Geography or in another Faculty of the university that carries out research on the environment. Regarding the project, we would recommend for future batches of this programme to consider deciding their research topic before coming to Irkutsk and getting in contact with their potential supervisors at ISU. This might even give to the students the chance to organise data collection in Baikal and the surrounding area.

Apart from the lectures, several interesting excursion were organised by our Faculty. So far we had an excursion to the Irkutsk Hydroelectric Power Station and another one to the Irkutskenergo Heat Power Plant. Furthermore, we visited the Institutes of Geography and Physics, which belong to the Russian Academy of Sciences. We also had an excursion to a Library nearby our Faculty and they provided us with a Library card. Furthermore, we went to an excursion to the Baikal museum, which is located in Listvyanka, a village near Irkutsk on the shore of Baikal. The museum has interesting exhibitions and aquariums including one with a Baikal seal.

To conclude, the modules offered at ISU are complementary to the theoretical modules offered at CAU and provide students with the necessary skills to pursue a research oriented career.

By Charitos Zapitis
Living in Irkutsk

Our home is a good Russian “общежитие”, which is comparable to a dormitory in Kiel. In our apartment there are four rooms with two beds each, a kitchen, two separate toilets and one separate shower. Altogether here could live eight persons. Our flatmates always change. Due to that we could meet some Russians and make friends. There is a cleaning lady coming a few times a week, which is very luxurious.

In the kitchen you can find a microwave, fridge, washing machine, stove and a table with four chairs. Furthermore, there are some cupboards with a pot, a pan, plates, cups, forks and spoons. There are no knifes, it is good to bring some. You can also find space to store some food. For persons who do not like cooking, there is the possibility to eat in the “Mensa” of the Geographical faculty. The portions are quite small but they have amazing desserts.

The rooms are about 16 m² big. We share a room. In the room there are two beds, the mattresses are not too young, a wardrobe, a desk with a chair and a TV.

The house and the apartment are always guarded by four security men and women. They close the doors between 23:00 and 00:00 and open again at 6:00 in the morning, but if we tell them in advance, we can ring a bell and they open at any time.

The location is very good. In a walking distance of 10 minutes there is the Geographical faculty, where we have all our classes. Three supermarkets and other shops, banks, bars
and restaurants are in the same distance. Next to our dormitory is a big birch forest where you can go for a walk and find a very small skilift. Additionally, the dormitory is in an area of plenty dormitories, so it is easy to find friends in the surrounding. You can also find bus stations close to the dormitory, where you can take a bus to the city centre. The city centre is a beautiful place, which invites you for a walk. There are nice buildings and cultural programs like theatre, ballet, cinema, etc. Angara river is flowing through the town, a walk on the banks of Angara is nice, too. As in every city you can find shopping malls, tourist attraction, the central market and plenty more. From the main train station and the central bus station there are many trains and buses leaving to nice and interesting places in the surrounding, which are worth going.

Living costs in Irkutsk are slightly higher than in Kiel. But as the DAAD funded scholarship is about € 900,- per month, it is sufficient, which means that even small trips in the surrounding area are possible and affordable. The accommodation costs about 100€. Public transportation is cheap. One ticket for a bus is about 0.25€. All buses within the city cost the same. Further, transportation to other cities are not too expensive. For example the trip Irkutsk-Lisvijanka costs about 2.50€. However, food and clothes are more expensive than in Kiel. Especially fresh fruits and vegetables are in wintertime expensive. In summertime you get good quality fruits and vegetable fresh and cheap on the market. The costs for food in the “Mensa” are similar to those in Kiel but you get a smaller portion.
Traveling in Siberia/ Recreational Activities

There are two different possibilities to travel to Irkutsk from Germany. The quick possibility is to fly via Moscow to Irkutsk. The long and scenic route is to take the train from Moscow to Irkutsk, which my friends and I did. First we spent 3 days in Moscow to do some sightseeing. Then, we spent 4 days in the Trans-Siberian railway and enjoyed nice landscapes until we approached Irkutsk. After our semester was done, my friend and I took the train from Irkutsk to Ulan Bator and further on to Beijing. Both cities are worth visiting, however, in Beijing is a lot more to see and you can spend easily several days there.

The region around Irkutsk and Lake Baikal offers many beautiful places that can be visited. For example Listvyanka is only about 70 km away from Irkutsk and lies at the shore of Lake Baikal. In Listvyanka, you can visit the Baikal Museum, which has great exhibitions about the flora and fauna of Lake Baikal and visit the small market, where you can eat delicious fresh fish. Furthermore, you can do a boat trip or start a 25km hike to Bolshie Koty. Additionally, from Listvyanka you can take the ferry to Port Baikal. From Port Baikal you can follow the old Trans-Siberian tracks by foot or take a tourist train, which runs about once a day. This part of the old Trans-Siberian Railway is the most scenic part of all the Trans-Siberian Railway. About half-way from Irkutsk to Listvyanka is the open air museum Taltsy. There are different houses and buildings from various ethnic tribes of the Baikal region are displayed. It is a really nice and close getaway from the city.

Baikal region is huge and sometimes it takes a little bit more time to reach a new place. Long weekends are great to visit the island Olkhon, health resort town Arschan, or the capital of Buryat Republic Ulan Ude. The university organized a weekend visit to the
island Olkhon for all international students. The island offers a great diversity of landscapes and interesting culture. The other two trips, my friends and I organized ourselves. To Arschan you take an autobus, which leaves from the train station and takes about 3h. In Arschan, you can do some hiking, drink fresh mineral water from natural sources and relax. Ulan Ude is further away. You can decide whether you want to take a train or bus. Each route takes about 8h. Ulan Ude is a large city and offers a nice downtown area for sightseeing and some museums. Further, about one hour outside of the city is the largest Buddhist monastery in Russia, which is worth visiting. Of course there are plenty more places that you can visit for example Angarsk, Bratsk, Tankhoy, Bolshie Kovy etc.. For me and my friends the most amazing days we spent at or near Lake Baikal because the Lake is so magnificent and beautiful and you can always discover something new.

Other recreational activities in Irkutsk include some sightseeing within the city. There are many beautiful cathedrals, places and buildings. A walk along the river Angara is always enjoyable. Irkutsk offers many cultural activities, such as shows of the Russian Ballet, which we visited in October, or a great environmental film Festival, which took place at a weekend in September. My friend and I joined the non-profit environmental organization Great Baikal Trail (GBT). This organization plans and develops a hiking trail system around Lake Baikal. In October, we spent a weekend with them in the mountains near Irkutsk. Further, we celebrated Christmas and New Year's Eve with our Friends from GBT. Also, we spent one weekend in January in Bolshoe Goloustnoye with our friends from GBT. Bolshoe Goloustnoye is a small, siberian village at the shores of Lake Baikal about 2 hours away from Irkutsk.