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Won't Miss This Again

Going for an exchange program abroad during my bachelor's degree study **has always been my goal**. I pursued this goal since the first day I enrolled in ITS, but COVID and other circumstances shifted my priorities, and I had a lot going on in 2021. When I noticed that there was a program called IISMA, it was too late for me to enroll, and I told myself that I won't miss IISMA 2022.

For me, it was **the last chance of realizing my goal** because other programs either delay my study in ITS or need too much financial investment. With that motivation, I began my preparation early for IISMA 2022. I researched about the documents I need to prepare, potential host universities, life abroad, and any other things that I can find on the internet about IISMA. I did my IELTS in February to give me time to prepare for other things, and I was grateful to get a sufficient score for my prospective host universities.

When choosing the host universities, the courses are my main priorities because **I wanted to study something that compliments my major**, and I also searched for the universities or cities that will give me the best experience. Looking back, I am really thankful for the experience I got because it helps me so much in so many ways.

A Myriad of Paperworks

I have participated in a Kampus Merdeka program, and I am blessed with the privilege of having applied for a visa before, so I know that **the pre-departure stage of my IISMA journey will be filled with paperworks, administration, and bureaucratic process**, but nothing can ever prepare me for everything I need to do before I depart to my host country. Before I applied, I asked my academic advisor to ensure that IISMA won't delay my studies, but after I got accepted I need to make sure in every way that I still can graduate on time.

The visa application process is a long one. Before everything began, **I needed to complete** the administration process in my host university which took quite a while, then I had to get my police record, fill in numerous forms, and go to Jakarta to apply for a visa. On the other hand, I also needed to submit academic forms in ITS for my credit transfer, and attend the pre-departure series hosted by the IISMA team, so I have a lot going on.

The pre-departure series itself is very useful, it tells you everything you need to know about the administration process of IISMA, guide from past awardees, and a lot of really cool public service announcements about student's struggles that I think is undervalued and underrepresented, and everyone needs to see it. **All in all, while it can be very tiring, it is a crucial step to prepare you for your journey abroad.**

Best Experience of My Life

When I arrived in Zagreb, **it all still felt unreal**. On the first day, we needed to get sim cards because only one person had roaming internet. We only knew that we needed to go to the city center, and somehow we got it from a newspaper stand after running to some closed stores in the night. The academic and networking experience went really well, **I did quite well in classes and managed to meet a lot of international students** either from the dorms or from classes. I also participated in some student network activities which really helped in adapting to the city and meeting other students.

In the second week, I bought a used bicycle from Facebook Marketplace for 65 euros (which I sold for 60 euros before coming back to Indonesia, was a great investment) by **haggling with the locals using google translate**. After settling in Zagreb, we had to make a cultural event to promote Indonesian culture and a charity event which I was in charge for, and it was a chaos planning the event because we collaborated with the student center for the venue, KBRI Zagreb for the foods and traditional clothing, and we also needed to look for the charity foundation.

We successfully held the cultural event and donated dog food to a local dog shelter, and for the rest of our program we collaborated a lot with KBRI Zagreb for their events. **I also did some traveling which was an awesome experience**.

So, What's Next?

Personally, I have quite a lot of plans for the future, and IISMA helps me a lot towards one of them: **doing my master's degree abroad**. My time abroad taught me a lot about adapting in other countries, helping other Indonesians abroad, doing cultural exchanges with people from different backgrounds, and so many more. I would like to collaborate with people from all over the world like what I did in Zagreb, and I hope I can share my experience and help people trying to adapt to a new place, culture, university, and people.

My plans don't stop there. After gaining all those cross-cultural experiences, **I want to help people who come to Indonesia to adapt here, and encourage them to have cultural, academical, and economical exchange as I want to maximize the potential that Indonesia has in a lot of aspects**, which in turn can develop Indonesia as a country and put our mark on the map.