My decision to spend a semester at Zanzibar University in Tanzania was one of the best ones I’ve made in my whole life. It was something I will never forget and that I never regretted. So many new experiences, friends, pieces of knowledge – And a whole new way to think about the world and life.

I spent the spring and the summer 2012 studying Islamic Law and Common Law as the only exchange student, the only European and the only white person in the picturesque village Tunguu. At first things seemed hard since pretty much nothing was working as things are in Finland. The practicalities were difficult and no-one seemed to be in charge when I tried to do something: register for the university and the courses or move to a different house. But people were unbelievably helpful and took me as one of them from day one. After a while, I started enjoying the easy lifestyle in Zanzibar.

It wasn’t only about the studies. It was about the whole experience. I learnt so much, not least about myself. Besides the studies, I was traveling around Zanzibar and also in Tanzania mainland. I went for an amazing safari and saw Mount Kilimanjaro, I learnt a whole new language Swahili, I attended an Islamic wedding. I was also volunteering in an organization: I planned a children’s rights program and taught English in a sober house to men who used to be drug addicts. That too was such a nice job. And believe me, the island was a paradise!

At the university, I took part in planning an environmental action and helped the Students’ Union in their work. On my spare time, I used to hang out with friends, go to the small capital Stone Town that was full of experiences too or teach the girls sports. It was also really interesting to experience the Islamic culture, religion and habits in everyday life. On the lectures, I learnt the theory
and between the lectures it was one big lesson of practical Islamic law.

I enjoyed my time in Africa unbelievably much. I fell in love with the continent the first day I arrived; with its people, its atmosphere, its surroundings, and its laid-back and simple style of enjoying life. The best part was the people. You’d think people are so different so far away. After a while you realize that, underneath the different cultural shell we’re all same people of the same human kind – With same hopes, same fears and same dreams.

I feel very privileged given the chance to do an exchange in such a wonderful place, know all the people I got to know and experience everything I did in Africa. Those are the things that are going to help me in my future, in whatever job I’m going to get. I feel like I could have easily stayed another semester. When I left Zanzibar for Finland again, I felt like I left one home for another home. I know I will go back some day.