

HELSINKI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

I was on exchange at the Helsinki School of Economics in Finland. My time there was a fantastic experience.

Academic Courses

The school has a range of papers taught in English, though I stuck to a selection of Economics papers. One of the papers offered is an introduction to the Finnish language and culture, which would probably be helpful to those who are taking a leap into the unknown. The papers cover a range of levels. I was able to take papers equivalent to 300-level, though these are sometimes referred to as Master's courses. There are also plenty of papers at roughly 100-level and 200-level.

The Economics papers fit well into the Otago system. I took Microeconomic Theory papers as substitutes for doing ECON 371, which was approved by the Economics Department. I also studied papers on international economics and trade. Having already sat the paper taught at Otago, this provided an interesting comparison. The papers in Finland covered much broader topics, being concerned with international capital flows, interest rates and exchange rates in addition to the models of international trade covered in the Otago paper.

HSE also has a student-friendly exam system; all papers have three different exams, at least one month apart. Students can sit their exams again to get higher marks if they fail, or are unhappy with their first effort. Alternatively students can miss the first exam entirely and just sit the second or third exam. This gives a chance to have a week off to travel around Finland during the middle of the semester.

Student Association

The student association at HSE, known as KY, is very helpful towards exchange students. The exchange students, about 150 in all, were divided into groups each with 2 local students to help them with anything they need. KY also provides accommodation to all exchange students, which all includes access to a sauna. The rent also includes power and high-speed internet connections.

The group liaison students organised a number of trips for the exchange students. These include a trip to Stockholm on the overnight ferry - a Finnish institution - and an excursion to Lapland, up in the far north. In winter we had only a couple of hours of very dim sunlight, but the environment up there has an amazing, ghostly beauty to it. This is definitely worth experiencing.

The best of the trips however was a 4-day excursion to St Petersburg, Russia. Coming from New Zealand, this is like entering another world. From taking two hours to get across the border; to the spectacular palaces from the time of the Czars; to the

incongruity of crumbling Soviet buildings and exclusive Western fashion labels; Russia is a fascinating place.

Finally, KY provides numerous social services, including putting on regular parties. These include a couple of parties for the exchange students, one of which is an introduction to the city combined with an initiation to the School.

Cost

Finland can be an expensive place. The cost of living is quite high, and alcohol is heavily taxed. Luckily KY provides cheap apartments to live in, and the cafeterias at HSE provide lunch from as little as 2 euros. The minimum amount required to qualify for a student visa will leave very little to experience Finland's charms outside of the student scene, so having some extra money is advisable. Apply for all the scholarships you can find to make the most of the opportunity. KY does put on some great parties though.

The cheapest of the apartments that KY has available are about 20-30 minutes out of town. This means that using public transport is essential. The cheapest way to do this is to buy a card for the entire time you will be there at the beginning.

Costs do have a way of mounting quickly in Finland. Especially when the New Zealand dollar drops in value, but if you can put together enough, you will find the place very rewarding.

Travel

Finally, going on exchange in Europe offers a great opportunity to explore places that you probably do not otherwise have the chance to as a student. I left Dunedin at the conclusion of one semester, and had two months off before starting my exchange semester. This allowed me to travel to other parts of Europe, and make the most of my time away from Otago.