



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	VSE, School of Economics Prague
Semester & Year of Exchange	S1 (spring semester) 2019
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Commerce
Major(s)	Economics and Finance

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Cryptocurrencies and other alternative monetary solutions in worldwide practice	English	ECON300	
Behavioral Economics	English	ECON300	
International Financial Management (in English)	English	FINC305	
Introduction to Game Theory	English	ECON300	
Marketing 1	English	MART100	

Any comments about these papers?

Easy papers. Game theory was the hardest but was probably equivalent to 200 level FINC or 300 ECON. The crypto paper was not as interesting as I expected.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

VSE papers are usually similar to the 100 level papers at Otago because they don't require many contact hours. Assessment is often group and presentation based, and it generously marked. I didn't take any intensive courses but if you are able to do so I recommend it.

Course selection occurs in January and is an allocation based system where you may not get the courses you signed up for. Most of the time it works out fine. Using INSIS (Evision) is not something I would wish on my worst enemy but you figure it out eventually.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

Definitely stay in the dorms rather than renting an apartment, as many parties are held there, especially before Nation2Nation on Tuesday evenings. The dorms are basic, but good, with a microwave and stovetop (however no oven). There is also a larger kitchen that can be rented.

The accommodation is in an area called Zizkov (Prague 3) which is very safe (as is all the CR) but is not particularly pretty. It's a 20 minute tram ride to university, 25 minutes to city centre and trams come every four minutes on weekdays. Pizza Zizkov is a popular take away place nearby.

I stayed in a single room in a flat with one other person. This was great because it was only the two of us sharing one bathroom and toilet. To get a single room you need to get in relatively quickly when they come out on the website ISKAM. You can pick the exact room number if you know somebody from Otago and want to live together. The flats are separated by gender.

In Jarov, the university is starting to invest in the dorms a lot more. This a soccer field with artificial grass on which I played quite often. There is also a tennis court, a volleyball court, a basketball court and an outdoor gym, all of which are relatively new.

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Prague is probably one of the cheapest destinations to go on exchange and just because it's cheap doesn't mean it isn't good. An exchange in Prague can be cheaper than Otago.

Accommodation: \$135NZD per week for basic single room dorm with shared bathroom. \$90pw if you share room.

Public Transport

I paid \$35NZD (330CZK) for three months of unlimited travel on trams, metro and buses as a student. I spent more in Berlin on public transport on a weekend away than I did here in three months. More information will be provided to you on how to do this when you arrive. The trams are excellent and the metro network is comprehensive.

Flights

For flights, I recommend using Google Flights to select a time period where the fares are cheapest. I think you will feel rubbish for a week after this journey no matter what. It's a lot of travel. I recommend arriving a few days before classes start. I arrived a week before and was heading to bed around 8pm some nights.

Food

50% of the time I cooked, and 50% of the time I ate out at the dorm canteen or elsewhere. It is affordable to go to the canteen where a meal will cost about \$4 - \$5 NZD for traditional Czech food (which I enjoy) or fresh salad.

Supermarket: Kauflands is the closest supermarket. It is a major chain and stocks most products but they don't speak a word of English, have poor customer service (extremely rude) and most products are listed in Czech and Slovak language only. Going and getting accustomed to Kaufland is a great personal development moment of Prague exchange and becomes enjoyable once mastered.

Supermarket prices are slightly below NZ prices.

Insurance

I took out a 1-cover unlimited medical plan that covered all of Europe. If you have health problems that are more common make sure you take it out with VZP (which is a Czech provider) as NZ based ones will have large excesses on claims. I went to the doctor a few times and was never able to claim as the prices were below my excess which in a way is a good thing 😊

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

Tips on the best way to manage finances:

1. Open an ANZ account (specifically ANZ at the time of writing) because they have zero fee ATM withdrawals overseas where other banks will charge you \$8.
2. Open a Revolut account as soon as you arrive and deposit money in it via Transferwise. Revolut is awesome as it charges zero ATM fees (though some ATMs may charge their own fee but will tell you), automatically converts currencies at no cost and has an awesome app to manage spending. I cannot recommend this enough for any European exchange and will save you time and money. It does not cost any money to join Revolut and is great for travelling due to the automatic currency conversion. Find my email at the bottom if you have any questions on this process.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

The visa process takes a long time as the Czech government is notoriously slow. I didn't need a visa as I hold an EU passport, but otherwise start the process not long after you have been accepted.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes!

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

If you like football, volleyball, tennis the facilities at the dorms are very nice and you will be able to play if you organise it over the big WhatsApp Group.

There are heaps of trips organised, themed days (sports day) and other activities throughout the semester to keep you entertained.

What was the university/ city like?

The university is comprised of three interconnected buildings of varying ages. The lectures tend to be small with around 20 - 60 students in each class and seminars (tutorials) often run directly after lectures. Sometimes this can mean three hours in a row of one class but that's the only time you have that course for the week.

There is a canteen where you can buy pizza for 47CZK (\$3) which is pretty okay. I found the library to be lacking in space and there were few spaces to study. I recommend going to the sciences library in town - it is beautiful and costs 10CZK to enter.

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Make sure you visit one of the many parks (Letna, Stromovka....) with your friends and take a few drinks on a sunny day. Drinking in public is allowed almost anywhere at any time so don't be afraid. I

sometimes found the Otago drinking scene to be overindulgent at times but in Prague people tend to drink to a better level. Moments in the park were some of my favourite memories on exchange.

I highly recommend getting out of Zizkov and exploring Prague 8 (Karlín) which was my favourite district. Additionally, there is an abandoned stadium and railway station in Prague which are super cool.

Any tips for future students?

Try get involved in as much as possible but don't worry about making friends. It's impossible not to make them. Join the WhatsApp groups that are created before the semester and join any additional groups. I met a lot of people through football and other events that were organised this way.

Make sure you go on Ice Breaking Weekend, there is nothing else in the semester like it and we all had a great time.

Bring passport photos (at least six) you will need them for all sorts of random Czech ID cards and university cards. If you don't do this in NZ you will waste a lot of time in Prague trying to get it organised.

If you can, apply for the physical ISiC card as soon as you get to VSE or in New Zealand. It has to be physical!! They will not accept the app version (which STA offer) so decline and get the physical one. It is about \$20 but you will save 75% on CD railways (Cesky Drahe) and RegioJet trains/buses. I've been to Vienna in business class multiple times for \$10 Euro.

Use FlixBus for cheap trips in Czech Republic. You can go for 2-3 hours on a bus for \$1.5 Euro it is insanely cheap. We went to Pilsen, Kalovy Vary and others using Flixbus.

Culture Tips

- Don't say to Czech people that they are from Eastern Europe. They consider themselves firmly central Europe.
- It is considered uncommon or suspicious to smile at stranger in public in Czech Republic (and Germany also) so don't consider people rude if they show no emotion on public transport for instance.
- Young Czech people generally speak good English but older Czechs will speak Russian and not a word of English. This is fine but they will continue to talk in Czech even when they can see you don't understand. Customer service is poor in this country but you will eventually end up loving it. It makes for a different experience from New Zealand and other parts of Europe.
- Czech people are often said to be unfriendly but I found this to be untrue. Maybe only with older Czech people who you will not encounter often.
- There are no ticket collectors on trams or metro. It works on an honesty system but if you are caught randomly by un-uniformed ticket instructors (you will never spot them) you will have to pay 800CZK. A three month pass is 330CZK so don't be an idiot.
- Always stand for older people or pregnant women on public transport. People are much more respectful in this regard than in NZ. The trams will be packed in peak hours.

Lastly, any destination for exchange is good and will be enjoyed no matter what, but Prague is the best. Cheap prices, central location for travel and a great university experience.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

My exchange in Prague was the best year of university equal with first year. I made some amazing friends, travelled to awesome places, and experienced a culture that is significantly different to New

Zealand and even other places in Europe. I truly believe that Prague is the best exchange destination and my only regret is that I didn't do another one somewhere else so I could confirm.

One of great reasons for exchange at VSE is the buddy system which I don't think is as comprehensive elsewhere. BuddySystem will assign you a buddy if you sign up for it who will pick you up from the Airport and show you to the dorm. They are great for asking questions even before you arrive and help you feel much better settled. I contacted my buddy throughout the semester and shared a class with her.

BuddySystem also organise many trips to nearby cities and countries. I can highly recommend the Krakow trip (in Poland) (where you visit the nearby concentration camp) and the Moravian trip where you get to taste Czech wine, visiting some of the largest mines in Europe.

BuddySystem also organise the Nation2Nation parties which are very loosely themed as a different country every week. These are awesome and take place every Tuesday (make sure you have Wednesday morning off) and can easily last until 5:00am if you desire. I did not consider myself a massive party person in Otago but in Prague it's much more fun. There are heaps of decent clubs and drinks are so cheap (\$3 for a beer and \$5 for a cocktail) that it really allows you to not think about the money.

Some of the countries I visited on weekends during the semester were Hungary, Germany, Austria, Poland but you can visit almost anywhere as there are many cheap flights from Prague.

Prague is the best destination for exchange. You can even spend less money than Otago if you get the business school scholarship and the grant. In my opinion, you gain less by visiting similar countries like the USA, Ireland and Britain. An experience in Prague will teach you so much about other ways of living but is still similar enough to home for a comfortable experience. Of all the cities I have visited so far in Europe Prague, though touristy in parts, has always been my favourite.

If you wish to contact me with any questions, please do. Send an email to TimmyArmstrong98@gmail.com

