



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Bergen
Semester & Year of Exchange	Third year, final semester
Otago degree(s)	BSC Marine Science
Major(s)	Marine Sci

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
GEOV217 Geohazards	English	none
NOR-INTRO Short Introductory Course in Norwegian Language	English	none
STAT202 Biostatistics	English	none

Total Otago credits gained: 54 points 72 points 108 points _____

Any comments about these papers?

LOVED the Norwegian intro and Geology. The Norwegian class was so cosy, I made a lot of friends there and it was super helpful in basic Norwegian. The geology course took me on an awesome field trip in the fjords (and we stayed in a fancy hotel!) - and it was really good for making friends.

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

My workload was extremely high due to the geology & the biostatistics courses. It was higher than Otago, and I struggled. If you want to relax on the exchange I would not advise taking more than one hardcore science paper.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in Sammen – the student housing association. Main points:

- It was cheaper than Dunedin!
- I had a fairly modern apartment with a little balcony
- The facilities included a gym with bouldering and a sauna
- I had 16 flatmates and a roommate (so expect to have little alone time/ personal space)
- Everyone in the housing complex was an exchange student so it's very social but you don't really meet Norwegians

It's great for meeting people, I became very close friends with a lot of my flatmates and we went on trips together nearly every weekend. It can be overwhelming though, not having your own space.

Money matters

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

Insurance: \$850 for the semester (by the provider recommended by Otago Exchange)

Flights: \$2500 total. I used Skyscanner to get the cheapest flights

Visa: \$1,000 for the application & appointment

Food: around \$100 per week. (go to the Kiwi supermarket, it's the cheapest)

Accommodation: \$695 per month so around \$170 a week, including power

Weekend Activities: I spent most of my weekend catching the train to the mountains. This would cost around \$20. I would stay in DNT cabins in the mountains which are \$30 a night.

Summary: The visa is expensive. Flights can be affordable if you look well. The cost of living is the same as NZ. I avoided eating out as that is quite expensive. There are cheap activities if you like the outdoors (cheap mountain cabins and free gear hire)

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

I used the Wise app for all my payments. I would recommend Revolut as more people used it.

Visas & Insurance

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

1. A lengthy online application
2. Book an appointment in Auckland
3. Print A LOT of documents that are to be handed in at the appointment. Triple check you have everything you need!

The Appointment: don't be worried! All that happens is they carefully look through all your documents to make sure you didn't miss any. They take your passport and then send your application away for you. You also get your fingerprints taken. That's it!

They send your passport & the documents to Bangkok to the Norwegian Embassy

It took 2 weeks after the appointment for them to return my passport and approve the visa

Main advice: book the appointment with enough time to get your passport back before you leave. Mine was exactly 3 weeks before my flight, and it was approved on time.

Entering customs in Norway / Europe: I printed the visa confirmation email and my acceptance letter from the University of Bergen. This was enough proof to be allowed in

The visa email states you 'must see the police within 7 days of entering Norway' – don't worry about this! The University of Bergen organises the police visit, so you do not need to do anything. At this appointment, they just take your photo for your Norwegian ID card. I didn't have this appointment until a month into my stay in Norway so it is not very strict. It took 2 months to be sent the physical ID card.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

Hiking: DNT (The Norwegian Trekking Organisation) makes most of the hiking/skiing trails in Norway. You can get advice in-store for the trips you are planning to make sure you have the right gear etc. They also own thousands of cabins in the mountains and along the coast. They are affordable to stay in – explore as many as you can! They are amazing. <https://www.dnt.no>

BSI Friluft: This is the outdoor club. They organise the best hiking/skiing/sailing trips and lots of weekly events like climbing, trail running or pub nights. <https://www.bsifriluft.no>

Volunteering – at the student bars (each faculty has one) or find something you are interested in (I volunteered at the aquarium), this is the #1 way to make friends with Norwegians!

Big Trips: I would recommend taking a long trip to Northern Norway (Lofoten in the summer and Tromsø in the winter). I did both, camping or staying with Norwegian friends so it can be cheap as chips. Flights to Europe are also super cheap, I went to Amsterdam and lots of people went to Copenhagen and Poland.

Random Travel advice:

Scandinavian Airline has cheap flights if you purchase a student ticket. They also never check the size of your hand luggage!

You can camp anywhere in Norway so travel can be cheap!

BUA is an organization which has stores in nearly every city. You can rent outdoor equipment from them FOR FREE – tents, hiking boots, skis, clothing, sleeping bags - everything! <https://www.bua.no>

What was the university/ city like?

City: pretty, surrounded by mountains and the ocean. The centre of town where the shopping streets/cafes are, is a small area - but cute! Quite touristy though so I didn't go in very often.

There is a big partying scene but it is very expensive due to the alcohol taxes (not the destination for you if partying is a priority on exchange).

The best aspect is the accessibility to hiking trails! Within an hour of leaving your accommodation you can be on a mountain top.

The university has great facilities. Lots of finding halls/cafes with good prices. Many libraries etc.

The student organisations are awesome for socialising / sports. Most faculties have a student bar which you can volunteer at or just go to for enjoying cheap beer and quiz nights etc. So there is a solid social scene at the university.

If you are a Marine Biology student it is a good option. The geology and geophysics department are awesome! Oceanography / chemical oceanography is great there.

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

In Bergen:

- Hike all 7 mountains!
- Bakeri 29
- The National Aquarium
- The Albatross Café (BEST place for cinnamon buns and cardamon bolle)

In Norway:

- The mountains around the west coast are best hiked in the summer
- Lofoten for hiking and the most beautiful beaches
- Oslo in autumn (the fall is so beautiful there and on the train ride)
- Trondheim & Tromso when there is snow!

Any tips for future students?

Look for flights into Frankfurt, London, and Amsterdam. These tend to be the cheapest hubs to fly into for getting to Europe

Invest in proper clothing. My quality of life improved a lot when I invested in proper outdoor clothing that the Norwegians were using. ESPECIALLY A RAINJACKET!

Get some good-quality, waterproof hiking shoes. It will make hiking a lot more fun, also everyone in Bergen wears them for everyday because it rains so much.

Make friends with a Norwegian! You get the best opportunities and authentic experiences. (My best experience was staying with a Norwegian friend and her family at Christmas. They live in the Arctic circle so we went skiing every day in the mountains and baked traditional Norwegian cookies while it snowed outside)

The visa process is stressful, but I promise it's fine! They will not deny it - the worst thing that can happen is you forget a piece of paperwork and you have to redo it

As soon as you land: download the 'Skyss Bilett' app. Buy a period ticket: 180 days for Zone A. This just means you can use any of the public transport in the Bergen region for the whole semester as much as you like. You will need to use public transport to get around!

Avoid the really touristy hikes like Trolltunga and explore the fjords and mountains yourself! There are endless hidden gems off the beaten track.

Use the DNT mountain cabins, they are amazing!

Overall Experience

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

Bergen is the place for you if:

- You love the outdoors and being active
- You want to spend your weekends exploring the mountains
- You want to be surrounded by crazy people obsessed with hiking and skiing
- You love cosy cabins, eating waffles and drinking coffee

I LOVED my time in Norway. I got so much time outdoors which is what I was hoping for. You need to be someone who is okay with the cold, and can handle the rain. We got used to going out even when the weather was bad because otherwise you'd be cooped up a lot! That's why the cabins are so amazing, you can be hiking in the worst conditions, be soaking wet and freezing but knowing you have somewhere warm and safe to sleep.

The Norwegians are so kind and welcoming once you get to know them! I was welcomed into several Norwegian families and have the best memories experiencing true Norwegian life

Bergen is quite southern so I took several trips up to the Arctic Circle and it was UNREAL! Highly recommend getting up to the North of Norway.

There is a big coffee culture in Norway! Be prepared to drink buckets

The country is obsessed with cinnamon rolls and cardamom buns! I spent a lot of rainy days trying the endless cosy cafes and bakeries



Skiing, fresh pastries, epic hikes and sailing in a Viking ship!



I LOVE NORWAY