



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Amsterdam
Semester & Year of Exchange	Sem 2, 2018
Otago degree(s)	Bcom – Finance, BA - PPE
Major(s)	

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
Investment and Porft. Theory 1		FINC202	18
PE: Dialectical Methodology		Unspec. POLS300	18
Behavioural Economics		Unspec. ECON300	18
Game Theory		ECON351	18

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

Less contact hours. More independent study is expected. It is easy to pass, but difficult to get a very high grade (9's or 10's rarely given).

Accommodation

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

I stayed at Weesperflat which is a shared accommodation with 15 exchange students. I was on the 7th floor which is reserved only for exchange students. All other floors are mainly Dutch students. Very central, close to both the university and to town. The room was okay, and the shared kitchen and bathrooms were pretty dirty, but if your used to a Dunedin flat then it's nothing to worry about.

Definitely worth the cheap rent of 370 euro/month. Overall, I had a very good time here, lots of parties and socializing in the common areas!

Money matters

Cost of living in Amsterdam was slightly more than Dunedin, but budgeting is easy if you are tight on money. Cook for yourself and I would recommend buying groceries at LIDL or Jumbo since these grocery stores are way cheaper than Albert Hein. Get a bike on day one!! You can buy cheap bikes everywhere, (I wouldn't pay more than 80 euros), lots of people rented bikes from Swapfiets . Biking saves you a lot of money and its definitely the best way to get around. Don't get fooled into buying a very expensive bike since it will probably get stolen at some point! Beers and going out in AMS is also relatively cheap, many clubs don't have a cover charge, but you may have to pay for coat check. If the club does have a cover charge it's probably for a good reason and worthwhile going! You have to pay to use the gym and play sports at the UVA, I forgot how much a membership cost, but I remember that it wasn't too bad. Expect to pay maybe 170 euro per week on living costs (depending on how much you go out and eat).

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

I opened a Dutch bank account with ABN AMRO as soon as I got there. And transferred money from my ASB account every few months. I would highly recommend getting a Dutch bank account, you can use your Dutch debit card everywhere (all around Europe) and pay for many things online with it.

Visas & Insurance

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

I didn't apply for a visa since I have a Dutch passport.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

No.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The international network at the UVA is outstanding! They organize so many trips and activities, especially in the first week. Get amongst it, it's the best way to meet new mates!! Every Wednesday throughout the term international students meet up at a club called Cocos Outback to party and listen to trash music. The Uni also organizes a 'super trip' which was a 5-day bus trip to Vienna, Prague and Budapest, it's a bit pricey but I would highly recommend it (this is where I met many of

my close friends)! Whenever there is a cultural event in the city such as kingsday or carnival, the student network will organise some sort of trip or gathering for international students.

What was the university/ city like?

The university campus is beautiful, very modern with lots of cool places to hangout and eat. Maybe I am biased, but even after travelling many European countries Amsterdam remains my favourite city (by a long shot). The canals, the old crooked buildings, the beautiful parks are definitely hard to beat.

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

The Dutch party like no other! And Amsterdam has one of the best techno scenes in the world. Before my exchange I hated techno, but I gave some techno clubs and festivals a chance and fell in love with the whole scene. Some places that I would recommend:

- De School (one of the best techno clubs in Europe)
- Shelter
- Thuishaven (Small festival vibes every weekend)
- Melgweg (for hiphop but hosts techno every tuesday)
- De marketkanteene.

Cool places to chill and hangout.

- AMS north, check out NDSM!
- Vondelpark
- Flevo park
- Maslows (cool, well priced restaurant situated in a student area, ended up becoming our local hangout spot)
- Volendam (a small fishing village an hour bike ride north)
- Anywhere really, forget google maps – grab a bike and get lost!

Any tips for future students?

I would recommend that every student going to Amsterdam should do so with an open mind. There are so many interesting people and cultures that reside in the city. Try to talk to Dutch students (not just the internationals), once you start chatting to them you will probably find that they are very nice and interesting. I became very good friends with my Dutch coach during the introduction week and he introduced me to his friends, many of who ended up becoming some of my best mates during the exchange. There are three main universities in Amsterdam, the VU, HVA and UVA (where I studied). The international student body collaborates with all three universities, so don't just focus on meeting friends from your university (I found that most of my friends were at the HVA and the VU). But my number one tip is be active and seize all the opportunities that come your way!

Since the start of your exchange may be a bit overwhelming here are some pointers for your first few weeks.

1. Arrive early (try to be in Amsterdam at least few days before your introduction week). I arrived the day before and was so jetlagged during the intro days
2. Spend money on making your place cosy right from the start. You want your room to feel like a home during the Amsterdam winter!

3. GET A BIKE ON DAY ONE!
4. Sort out an NS student card (for metro, trams and trains)
5. Get all the university admin and papers sorted before you start. It sucks having to do this during the first week of university when you are busy with class and meeting people.
6. Sign up for a sports team or gym at the start.
7. If you want to travel while you are in Amsterdam, check for cheap flights from the get go! Ryan air can have some crazy deals to cool places in Europe if you book a few months in advanced.

Overall Experience

I know it sounds cheesy and that everyone says this about their exchange, but this was definitely the best 6 months of my life! If anyone reading this needs convincing or is interested in doing an exchange in Amsterdam and wants to know more about the city, please feel free to send me an email at tommieberkman1@gmail.com. And if anyone ends up choosing Amsterdam and wants to meet some Dutch people there, send me an email and I can put you in contact with some! But honestly, doing an exchange at any university will be a blast, it's all about the people you meet and what you make of it.