



## Student Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Otago degree(s)</b> Bachelor of Arts	<b>Major(s)</b> Politics
<b>Host University</b> University of Amsterdam	<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b> Semester 1 2018

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent	Otago credit value
<b>Eurocentrism</b>	English	1 arts paper	18 points
<b>European Memory and Heritage</b>	English	1 arts paper	18 points
<b>Cities and Change</b>	English	GEOG215	18 points
<b>Cultural Conflicts: From the Berlin Wall to the Anthropocene</b>	English	1 arts paper	18 points

Any comments about these papers?

Courses vary hugely across the board, Eurocentrism was very similar to an Otago course, European Memory and Heritage was very interactive, every class was a tutorial-style format because there was only about 20 people in the class and we were expected to participate, same for the Cultural Conflicts paper. In general assessments are similar to Otago, they like presentation assessments though, and some teachers will do something a bit more unique like making a virtual exhibition. The essays I had to write were more like full-on research papers, one was 6000 words in a group of three. I only had exams for two of the courses.

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

The teacher of Cities and Change was not great, she was quite inexperienced with the content. Cultural Conflicts was super deep and theoretical and so you absolutely had to do the readings or risk being utterly lost. There are quite a lot of readings for most classes and you'll see quickly that the teachers expect you to have read them, especially in the interactive format of classes.

UvA had a major weakness in that they only want you to study in one faculty and they split up Humanities and Social Sciences, so it's difficult to do the same mix of subject as you might study at Otago (for example

I couldn't take politics AND French and ended up not taking either because of their system). The faculties also don't communicate with each other so if you do take one course in another faculty there might be issues with scheduling, like I had an exam clash which was unreasonably complicated to sort out.

The moral of my story is that you should make sure you choose the right faculty and that there are papers that you want to take in that faculty BEFORE you apply for the university. I'm not saying I would have necessarily gone to a different university, but I would have gone about the process differently. Remember that the only papers you're allowed to take are the ones in 'Amsterdam Exchange Programme – Humanities/Social Sciences/etc' not just any paper which is taught in English.

## **Accommodation**

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

I stayed at Blijtespad/Kattenburger which is one of the buildings managed by DeKey, so may be on offer if you get accommodation through the university. Compared to the other housing corporation DUWO, DeKey has more places near the centre, but it also has some further out and it's pretty much luck of the draw which ones you are offered but you should have a few to choose from at that point in the process depending on which type of accommodation you want (I chose single room with shared facilities). Everywhere you could end up has pros and cons, so don't stress about it too much, it's so easy to get into the city from the edges, and just because you're in the centre doesn't guarantee you'll be near the university.

Blijtespad/Kattenburger is basic but really fine for one semester.

Pros:

- great location
- DeKey fixes stuff fairly quickly
- good mix of Dutch and international students
- sink in the room
- fridge and microwave in my room (but not everyone had this)

Cons:

- there were mice in the kitchen
- no dryer on my floor
- showers are super basic and broke a few times
- cleaning is down to residents so if you don't have someone sorting out a chore schedule or live with messy people then it'll be messy and dirty in the common areas

## **Money matters**

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

Rent is obviously more than Dunedin but my place wasn't too expensive, €365 a month.

Flights: I got a really good deal for flights over there and I would 100% recommend going to see STA travel because they genuinely can help you out, coming back was more expensive but we all know that flights to NZ are going to be expensive.

Food is cheaper depending on where you shop, obviously if you eat out it's going to be more expensive.

There's a few supermarket chains, Albert Heijn is good quality and easier to find in the city centre, but Jumbo and Lidl are cheaper. I reckon I spent €30 a week on food, sometimes less.

Insurance: I got Southern Cross travel insurance because I was already a Southern Cross member, but it's not massively expensive, just check out a few to see which company is best for you.

My biggest cost was traveling, but that's because I did a lot. Scandinavia is more expensive, Dublin has super cheap flights but it's much more expensive for accommodation, Slovenia is value for money, Budapest has a reputation for being cheaper but actually it has caught up with the west and most costs are the same.

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

I used an Air NZ OneSmart card which was good to transfer NZD to Euros. However, a lot of places in the Netherlands won't let you use credit cards so you will probably want to get a Dutch bank account so that you don't have to constantly be getting cash out.

I got an ING bank account which was helpful so I didn't have to get cash out a lot but you will have to pay around a \$25 fee to transfer money from an NZ account and also you have to leave €10 in the account to close it.

### **Visas & Insurance**

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

I did not, because I have a British passport.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

UvA requires you to have health insurance.

### **Extra-curricular/Social Activities**

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

I recommend signing up for the ISN intro week, it was a lot of fun and a great way to get to know the city in your first few days there, plus make a lot of friends from so many countries! People in my intro week group were my closest friends on exchange and my group's coach was super helpful. I went on the ISN supertrip to Prague, Budapest and Vienna, which was awesome and one of my highlights of the whole semester.

What was the university/ city like?

Amsterdam is a very cool city, and very different to Dunedin. It's densely populated, busy all the time, masses of tourists in the centre and loads to see and do. I missed the laid-back vibe of Dunedin for sure. Also there isn't a 'student culture' because it's not a student city, so not many student discounts, not many student hangouts or student areas outside of the university buildings. It's very safe to walk around at night, although don't hang out in parks late at night because bad things do happen occasionally.

The university has buildings across the city centre, which seems cool but I found it to be a pain, for example if you have back to back classes which are in far apart, and most of the student services are at the Roeterseilandcampus but if you are a Humanities student you will not have classes there.

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

There's so much to do, obviously the museums are on another level, but also get out of the city and go The Hague which has a more low-key vibe and a great beach. Try some Surinamese food! If you're in need of a bit of home comfort there is a Kiwi café called Bakers and Roasters which does Kiwi style food and most of the staff are Kiwis too. If you're there in spring go to Keukenhof tulip gardens, the best time is early April I believe.

Any tips for future students?

My number one tip is to get off your bike and walk around. You miss a lot when you're cycling because you're rushing about. Another thing is, you don't have to get a bike. Everyone will say you need one, but you really don't if you live in the centre and you like walking through the city, which is really nice to walk around. The public transport is great so anywhere further afield is still super accessible.

### **Overall Experience**

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

Overall, I had a positive exchange experience. A lot of that was to do with the people who I met in Amsterdam and shared the experience with. Of course, there were ups and downs but I have no regrets. The highlights I have from this past semester are traveling with these new friends and also alone, exploring Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Europe. Amsterdam is a great place to go as an international student because you will never be alone, there are thousands of students there from all over the world. Additionally, there is almost no language barrier because the Dutch speak excellent English and other exchange students speak English too, so I felt very lucky to already have it as my first language, and sometimes felt a bit underachieving when surrounded by people speaking fluent English as their second language! I attempted to learn Dutch because it helped give the city and culture more context and while I'm definitely not fluent, it was fun to try. I learned a lot about myself, about other people, and about the world while on exchange, most of all to take advantage of every opportunity and enjoy every day for what you have. Sometimes it was difficult to relax knowing how many things there were to do around the city, but that helped me manage my time between studying, getting out and doing stuff, and taking time for myself.



The Supertrip group at the John Lennon Wall in Prague, Czech Republic in April.



Classic Amsterdam tourist photo of the Amsterdam sign at the Rijksmuseum.





The view outside my building, windmill included.



With friends from Canada, Greece, Australia and Auckland in Budapest.