



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	University of Amsterdam
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	2019-2020 (Semester One European)
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>Major(s)</b>	Archaeology and Psychology (only Arch on exchange)

### Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

<b>Course title</b>	<b>Language of instruction</b>	<b>Otago equivalent</b>	<b>Otago credit value</b>
A Cultural History of the Ancient World 1: The Near East and the Greek world	English		
Science and Archaeology	English		
A Cultural History of the Ancient World 2: The Hellenistic world, Italy and Rome	English		
Cultural Contact: East and West	English		
			All four papers together count as a 3 paper Otago semester

Any comments about these papers?

I chose these papers to explore a different subject other than what I could do at Otago (Mediterranean archaeology) and they did not disappoint! I had a complete crash course in Greek and Roman archaeology and it was fantastic to be able to apply my knowledge while visiting the small archaeological museum connected to the university. It was a lot of reading, but I still feel like I know a lot of the information, so it was definitely a good way to learn (for me, anyway!)

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

The workload, for my papers at least, was much more than at Otago. To be fair, the two-lots-of-eight-weeks semester structure sort of requires that. We do cover a lot of content within those eight weeks, but you just have to stay on top of the reading for these papers. Overall, it wasn't difficult, just unexpected. Personally, I enjoyed the course load and feel like I learned a lot.

I do know from my friends that the courses differ hugely in workload, so don't let that deter you!! It's not too overwhelming, but it's not just a holiday.

## Accommodation

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

So, accommodation in Amsterdam is hugely limited. I went with the university accommodation, which worked out great, but it is very competitive. You get an email at the same time as everyone else searching for a room, and it's basically first come first served.

Because of the time differences, my email arrived in the early morning and it was about 6 hours before I was able to log on. I ended up getting a room in a building called Maassluisstraat, which is a 20-minute bike ride from town. Not my first choice, and initially I was a bit disappointed, but I'm actually super glad I got this place.

While the rent is more than I would have liked (around 1000 NZD a month), the building is fantastic. It's a single person studio apartment with my own kitchen, bathroom, and a double bed. The building is very new and being able to control the room temp down to the degree is a luxury after student flatting in Dunedin! The only thing about my accommodation that I would maybe change is that it's difficult to meet people whilst in a studio apartment. I did want a room in a shared flat, but this was my only option at the time. However, it's great having my own space just in case there's a day when I literally don't want to see any humans, stay in pyjamas, and walk three metres to my fridge.

## Money matters

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

Accommodation is probably the most expensive thing in Amsterdam: my rent was 1000 NZD a month. However, I thought it wasn't that much more expensive than New Zealand for the quality of my accommodation.

For food, I paid around 30 euros a week for groceries. Eating out is more expensive but you can always live off the 1 euro pastries from the supermarket (I recommend the frikandelbroodje!!)

My insurance with Southern Cross Travel Insurance cost 800NZD for worldwide coverage between August and early February. I would recommend paying more to have no excess so you can make a claim no matter how much the claim is for.

My flights are a bit tricky because my ending flights went through a couple different countries, but my arriving flight was around 1000 NZD and I think my returning is 1500 NZD. My return cost a lot more because I delayed buying it, definitely my own fault. It would also cost less to buy return tickets, rather than one way like I did. However, buying one way means I had time to decide later which countries to visit before I left.

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

On coming to NL I searched out getting a Dutch bank account and honestly? It was incredibly easy. ING bank allows students to make an account without having their BSN (resident) numbers yet. You just need to organise it as fast as possible because slots for appointments at the bank go really fast. Having the card was super easy, because some places only accept local debit cards (Maestro) and it's easier to manage how much you're spending than with cash. It's also really easy to transfer money from an ANZ account into an overseas one.

## Visas & Insurance

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

I had to apply for a residence permit, but the university helps you with that. It's a simple process, and the university sends you emails prompting each stage. The final stage you complete on the first day at university, because the international student network organises a day in which they help people register at city hall and finalise their visa applications. Eventually you have to get an appointment to give your fingerprints and have your photo taken, and then you pick up the card a month or so later. It's really very easy. It helps that, with a NZ passport, you don't actually need the visa to enter the country in the first place.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Yes, everyone going to the university needs health insurance, but I assume anyone travelling would want it anyway. I never used the health system, so I can't give advice on it though.

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

One hundred percent the best thing I ever did was participate in the international student introduction week. You are placed in a group with other new international students and two or three local coaches and go through events during the week together. From that initial week, I am still friends with the majority of that group. It really set me up for a fantastic semester abroad and I would recommend that you do not miss this opportunity to meet new people.

In general, I would recommend going to as many ISN events as you can. You meet so many people and get to do things at extreme discounts. For example, you can go on bus trips to other places around the Netherlands, or even Europe. Sadly, I had classes every day so I couldn't do the long trips, but the opportunity was there to go to Prague and Luxembourg among others.

*What was the university/ city like?*

Fantastic. I cannot praise Amsterdam enough, to be honest. My university campus was right in the centre of the city, and it was amazing to bike or walk amongst the canals every single day. The university also has coffee machines that give 42 cent hot chocolates, it's great.

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

This is such a hard question. The whole city is full of little streets with things to discover around every corner. Two of my favourite things are the Albert Cypmarkt and Foodhallen. But explore! Just walk everywhere, you might find your new favourite place.

*Any tips for future students?*

Be prepared to actually do some studying, depending on what course you do. Also be prepared to spend some money. Don't be afraid to: buy those silly touristy things, buy fries three times a week if you want to. Don't be afraid to bike for twenty minutes to have good housing. Go to the introduction week!!

## Overall Experience

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

It's so hard to explain my exchange as anything other than a rollercoaster that I really don't want to leave. It had a rocky start with my suitcase going missing, but luckily it was found quickly. From here, I had the time of my life. I made so many wonderful friends in the first week. So much so that we made the split decision to go to an electronic dance music festival two days before it began.

I loved exploring The Netherlands, both with just friends and on organised trips (even if, 5 months later, I'm still recovering from the awful tan line I got during a 1 hour bike ride...) Amsterdam is also incredibly well connected to almost every place you could dream of visiting. I'm writing this before I actually leave but I've been to a fair few places already. Jumped into a Fjord in Oslo, for example! Here in Amsterdam, I was able to organise my studies to leave my January empty, which means I've been able to organise a little tiki tour at the end of my exchange before leaving Europe.

Back in Amsterdam, there are endless things to do. I'm still finding new exciting places today (like the hidden Catholic Church in an attic) and would see something exciting every time I went into town. There are so many museums to visit, and I invested in the yearly museum card = free entrance to as many as you want!

Along the way, I feel like this exchange really bolstered my confidence. I learned that I am, in fact, able to survive living by myself. I learned that making friends isn't that scary. And also that travelling alone isn't bad at all! If anything, it feels liberating to get somewhere yourself.

Also, as a final note, seeing the New Year in Amsterdam was the most insane experience of my life. People say it's like a war zone, and they were not kidding. You go into the centre and are just instantly surrounded with smoke and fireworks. It's incredible. The



smoky picture here is from that evening! It was taken in Dam Square, and you can barely see the Christmas tree.

Can you tell it's hard to summarise everything? It is. You'll do so many things.

