



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Amsterdam
Semester & Year of Exchange	2 nd Semester, 2025
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Politics, Philosophy and Economics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Finance	English	300-level Finance
Conflict & Cooperation	English	300-level POLS
Democracies and Democratization	English	300-level POLS
Political Behaviour	English	300-level POLS
Integrative Seminar- Hype Beyond Psychedelics	English	300-level PHPE

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

Any comments about these papers?

Papers were interesting although they tend to be broader than those at Otago in terms of the topics they cover and move through concepts much quicker. Important to note that the politics papers focus primarily on events within the EU and the Netherlands and less so on the US/Asia/Pacific.

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

I found academic life in Amsterdam more challenging than in Otago. The semester is split into three 'blocks', so typically you are only taking two papers at a time (first two blocks are around a month and a half, the third is slightly shorter). This means more hours of lectures and tutorials per week (all lectures/tutorial are two hours- usually you will have two lectures and two tutorials per course a week). More interaction with other students and participation in tutorials is required, and there is a lot more assessed groupwork than in Otago. Standards of assessment are also different- getting an

A+ (a 9 or higher) is virtually impossible- 7 or above is considered a high score. I personally found that specifically in the PPLE program the quality of your work and engagement with the content/critical thinking matters much more- I would be prepared to get grades lower than you are perhaps used to getting in Otago. It is relatively common for students to fail exams/papers- don't worry about this though, they have exam resits which most people do pass.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in a Lieven de Key apartment which I was able to obtain through the university housing lottery. It was a bit more expensive than average rent prices in Dunedin, although much cheaper than renting privately owned property.

Pros: very quiet, I had a private room and bathroom, heating and electricity included in rent, very warm in the winter months, nice bike path to the ferry, bar with cheap drinks attached, two minutes from grocery stores and outdoor shopping area

Cons: far away from university (35-45 minutes), a bit run-down, not very social, in residential area so not close to nightlife/clubs/central Amsterdam shopping district

Money matters

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

Rent was 530 euros per month- this can vary across Lieven de Key accommodation, however, as you are able to select a budget category

Flights (to Amsterdam through San Fran and back to Auckland through Singapore- \$3000

Visa- I can't remember the specific amount, but I don't recall it costing more than \$500NZD

Food- Food in Amsterdam tends to be very expensive, especially eating out. Unfortunately, this is pretty unavoidable, although some key products are cheaper than in New Zealand (fruit, vegetables, pastries, cereal). Groceries probably cost me an average of 80 euros per week

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

Having cash on hand is a good idea (can be easier to purchase items if you want to go to markets, etc.), although I found that all vendors accepted my Wise card. I recommend both downloading the app and getting the physical card, as it is very easy to transfer money across bank accounts and currencies.

Visas & Insurance

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

Process to get a visa was a bit of a pain. I was able to get into the country without a visa, although they did ask me to confirm I had booked an appointment with the municipality when I told the customs officer the purpose of my travel. Basically, just a lot of admin, you have to go to the municipality and get your biometrics taken, then wait a couple weeks and then sign up for the app, wait for them to send a letter confirming your social security status, and then book another

appointment at the municipality to pick up your residence permit. However, most exchange students have to do this so it's pretty easy to figure out.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Yes, mandatory health insurance (luckily, I never had to claim anything).

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

As an exchange student, the one thing I would really recommend signing up for is all the orientation week events- this is where I met the most people, some of whom ended up becoming my best friends. The University of Amsterdam does have a lot of clubs and societies, although note that a lot of these are quite exclusive (many don't accept exchange students), and there is a membership fee for joining. I went to a couple fun events organized by the PPLE (AIM) society and politics society- free alcohol is often involved- so worth checking these out. Also, I signed up for a fitness class pass for the university gyms and really enjoyed this- there is a wide range of sports and classes available at several different locations throughout the city.

What was the university/ city like?

University was really nice (there is a separate PPE building which was interesting)- there are 3 main campuses and the one I studied at was very central, close to the botanical gardens, with cafes/supermarket/gym nearby. I found that there was more of a student culture- when it was sunny, lots of people would sit outside with friends and chat. Several cafes on campus were also a cool vibe, good places to study or hangout (although coffee was expensive).

Amsterdam is a beautiful city, and very accessible, particularly with a bike. The central districts (Rokin, De Pijp) tend to be quite touristy and crowded, but still fun to walk around and go shopping. The weather was not as bad as I had heard, and it never got colder than in Dunedin which was a plus. Public transport was amazing (super easy to access the airport and take trains to other cities in the Netherlands), generally everything was really clean, and very safe (I never felt worried walking alone by myself, even at night).

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

Visit Kukenhof during the spring (gets crowded during the day, so go early- the tulips/flowers were worth it)

Krater and the CREA cafe (on Roeterseiland Campus) both have great chai lattes/hot chocolate

Take the train (30-40 minutes) to Utrecht or the Hague

Go clubbing at Skate Cafe in Noord (has an outdoor soccer court, skate ramps, photobooth, etc.)

Van Gogh Museum (try and book tickets in advance though, and during the week rather than on the weekend)

Take a canal cruise at night- costs 20-30 euros depending on where you book and some have unlimited drinks. Also, if you are confident driving a boat and want to explore the canals yourself, they are available for rent

Oosterpark and Vondelpark are beautiful during the spring/summer months- lots of young people go there to drink/have picnics/chill in the evening

Any tips for future students?

Don't stress out too much- planning for exchange seemed to take forever and got very frustrating at times, but everything fell into place once I got to Amsterdam. Be as open and friendly as possible- people generally like Kiwis and are interested to hear more about life here (and don't listen to what the internet says- Dutch people are lovely and in a lot of classes approached me to say hi and chat)

Overall Experience

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

The five months of exchange in Amsterdam were some of the best of my life- there is so much to see and explore in Amsterdam/Europe and so many opportunities to travel and meet people from all over the world. I was terrified to go, but I think the experience of moving to Amsterdam by myself helped me gain a sense of confidence and independence that I didn't have before. Although I wasn't necessarily doing something new or crazy everyday (there was a decent amount of studying), looking back some of my best memories were the simplest moments- getting drinks with my friends, walking around Amsterdam, etc. I don't think there is a better way to travel, explore the world, get out of your comfort zone and meet people, which is why I would recommend exchange to anyone who is even considering going.







