



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	Charles University
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 1, 2023
Otago degree(s)	LLB/BA
Major(s)	Politics, Philosophy, and Economics

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
Israel's Foreign Politics	English	POLS 300
Comparative Economics	English	ECON 200
Understanding European Union Politics	English	POLS 216
Global Political Philosophy	English	PHIL 300
Justice in Politics and International Relations	English	POLS 202
Geopolitics of Violent Non-state Actors	English	POLS 300

Total Otago credits gained: 72 Points

Any comments about these papers?

All these papers offered a zoom option as well. These weren't my first paper selections but because of VISA issues, I was not able to arrive in Prague for the beginning of the semester.

Most courses at Charles University do not provide lecture recordings so these are unique. However, some lecturers will only allow zoom attendance for legitimate reasons.

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

The academic workload is not as intense as Otago. I took 6 papers which was the equivalent of 4 papers at Otago. 5 of my 6 papers only had 80 minutes contact time a week. My economics paper had 160 minutes contact time. You can schedule your papers quite well because of the low contact hours. I had three days with scheduled classes and two days off a week. This allowed me time to explore the city at the beginning of the semester and more time to study closer to Exam season.

In the faculty of social sciences, they offer 3 exam dates to choose from for each paper. This means you get three attempts if you are struggling, but alternatively you can arrange to sit all your exams early, so that you have more time for travelling afterwards.

Accommodation

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

I stayed in one of the Charles University dormitories. My dormitory was called Kolej Komenskeho. You will get an option to choose whether to stay in a shared room or a single room. The shared rooms are cheaper but for me personal space was worth a slightly more expensive room. Also, if too many people apply for a single room, they will just assign you to whatever is still available.

The accommodation at the University is not the most up to date. Some dormitories are better than others, but it is cheap (approximately \$400 NZD per month). Some of the other dormitories did not have receptionists who spoke English so you will need to be prepared with Google translate.

My dormitory did not allow outside visitors, so if that is a deal breaker for you, potentially consider other accommodation options. I think that was a general dormitory rule, however, it sounded as if my dormitory was one of the only ones that enforced this.

The dormitories will provide bedding and basic amenities. However, you will need to get your own kitchen equipment. There are some secondhand shops in Prague where you can find kitchen equipment. There is also an IKEA on the outskirts of the city and I also picked up a lot of my things at a two dollar-esque store in the same complex.

Some of the University dormitories are also quite far away from the central city, however, depending on which faculty you attend this might not be a big deal. The campuses are spread out around the city.

The other good thing about the dormitories is that you can end your contract early. If you submit a form at least one month before you plan to leave, you do not need to stay/pay rent until the end of your contract. So, if your exams end earlier than expected, you can leave to travel.

Money matters

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

My initial flights were \$2800 dollars from Auckland to Prague. They were cancellable flights, so I was refunded this amount and my next flights were \$2200 return from Brisbane to London (I did some travelling beforehand and afterwards so this worked best for me.)

My accommodation was \$400 a month, through Charles University accommodation.

The VISA cost \$300. But I also had to pay - to the NZ government for my criminal record authentication.

Food is relatively cheap in the Czech Republic, however, including the costs of going out each week for social activities I probably spent \$70-\$80 a week on food.

My student safe insurance cost: \$510.75

My Czech health insurance cost: \$555.51

Public transport is insanely cheap in Prague. If you pay \$15 NZD for a Charles University ISIC card, you can get the student discount. However, you must always carry your ISIC card alongside your public transport card to show ticket inspectors. This came out at around \$20 NZD for three months. The ISIC card also allows you to get discounts on other things, so is well worth the investment. You can register on the app or get a physical card, but you can't have both, so I chose the app.

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

I used my kiwibank debit card. It charged a 2.5% surcharge on every transaction. I also had to withdraw cash regularly as some places in Prague will not accept cards. Certain Czech banks will not charge withdrawal fees, one of the better bank ATMs to use was KB.

A better alternative is a Wise Travel card. My mother came over to visit and used that, it did not charge conversion fees.

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, stays longer than 3 months in the Czech Republic require a long stay Student VISA. Please get on to this process as soon as possible.

Here is a link to the VISA requirements:

https://www.mzv.cz/sydney/en/visa_consular_information/visa_information/long_stay_visas/long_stay Visa_students.html

You will need to:

1. Fill out an application form.
2. Provide two professional photos.
3. Provide a valid passport.
4. Provide evidence of sufficient funds.
5. Provide evidence of purpose of stay.
6. Provide evidence of accommodation.
7. Provide a criminal record clearance, authenticated and translated by the NZ government
8. Pay a processing fee.
9. Get Health insurance with a specific Czech provider.

Please start the process as early as possible and email the consulate as soon as possible. The website says that you need to go into the consulate in person. However, the consulate is in Australia, and they need to hold onto your passport until your VISA is approved, so the best option is to send it by post rather than stay in Australia for 60 days. However, confirm this with the consulate, they are your only method for getting a Czech VISA, so whatever they say goes.

The criminal record check, authentication, and translation takes the longest amount of time. 15 working days for the criminal record check, 15 for authentication, and an unspecified amount of time for translation. However, if it seems to be taking too long email them. Mine took two months, however, as soon as I emailed them, they sent it through.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

My host University does not have mandatory insurance. However, it is a mandatory VISA requirement to get Czech medical insurance from a specific company. I ended up using the Otago recommended insurance StudentSafe and the Czech medical insurance; Pojišť'ovna VZP. It felt superfluous to have double health insurance but because I wanted to travel, I needed to have health insurance that would cover me in other countries.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

The faculty of social sciences at Charles University had a fantastic international department! They put on an orientation week and organised frequent events throughout the semester. I went on an Easter hike with them and attended board game nights, Easter egg painting, parties and various other events planned by the department.

Follow the Ohmyprague instagram page and the ESNprague instagram page for events for all international students in Prague. ESNprague ran a weekly pub quiz and planned lots of other day trips and excursions around the Czech Republic.

There are also WhatsApp group chats set up to promote parties and club nights for exchange students.

What was the university/ city like?

Prague is gorgeous. It has beautiful buildings, lovely parks, and lots to do. It is a very cool city to explore. Not everything is in walkable distance, but the public transport is fantastic, so everything is very accessible.

Prague has become a bit of a tourist hub, so I recommend that if you want to go and see the tourist attractions go during the week, the weekend can be very overwhelming.

The university is spread out across lots of different campuses. I had some classes in the heart of the city and some in the more suburban/industrial areas. I think it is a bit more evident on the outskirts of the city that it used to be part of the USSR, but the heart of the city is so picturesque.

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

The classic Prague attractions are:

- * Prague castle
- * Charles Bridge
- * The astronomical clock tower and baroque library
- * The dancing house
- * The national theatre
- * The Pétrin tower
- * The moving head

I also highly recommend exploring the parks and gardens in Prague. There is an abundance of beautiful gardens in Prague.

Any tips for future students?

Apply for your VISA as soon as possible and if you can't, make sure you are acquiring all the relevant documents, do not wait for one to arrive before you start to procure the next.

Overall Experience

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

I arrived a little bit later than most people. I had missed orientation week, so I was scared that it was going to be difficult making friends. I did not need to worry. I had a really great time in Prague! I really enjoyed the range of classes I could take in the faculty of social sciences and I had a great time meeting new people. I also was able to travel a lot around Europe and really enjoyed going to new places. I would highly recommend Charles University for anyone who wants to travel round Europe, Prague is very central, and you could get very cheap fares to all the neighbouring countries.

Day hiking trip in Germany



Prague – Faculty of Social Sciences Easter Egg Painting



Czech Republic –Mountains Trip with the Faculty of Social Sciences for Easter