



## My Exchange Evaluation

### Basic Information

<b>Host University</b>	University of Helsinki
<b>Semester &amp; Year of Exchange</b>	Semester 2, 2018
<b>Otago degree(s)</b>	Master of Planning
<b>Major(s)</b>	-

### 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>
Introduction to Urban studies and planning	English	400 LEVEL PAPER	10?
Urban book club	English	400 GEOG PAPER	10?
Harvesting wild resources	English	400 GEOG PAPER	10 ?
Urban metropolitan cultures in Europe	English	400 GEOG PAPER	10?
		All up transferred to 40 points at Otago	

*Any comments about these papers?*

They were all quite straight forward. With these papers, especially the planning papers it is all about your own thinking, what you found interesting and what you learn. Quite different to Otago papers in a sense. Also some lecturers were hard to understand and had very difficult accents to understand.

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

Since I went in my 5<sup>th</sup> year, I found lots of concepts and topics they were teaching I had already learnt about previously. I did find it interesting to see how they could be applied in a different context though. The workload was very minimal in a sense, I had two-three days max of classes a week, I arranged my papers and did my work in those days so I would have free time and could travel a bit in the weekend. The workload was not too stressful and I did not have exams. I will note that it is confusing picking papers as online there seems to be lots of papers available but once you get over there your choices seem to be more limited. Also lots of there exams over there are done electronically too which is different to Otago.

## Accommodation

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

I stayed in a shared apartment with 7 other people. It was through the Hoas company. The pros were that the apartment was a two minute walk to the campus and that they tend to house students by nationality. In our apartment we had two kiwis, two Canadians, two south Koreans and two Chinese people. The cons were that I did not realise how many people I was sharing with until I got there, I thought it was three people but turned out to be eight people.

I also found out about my accommodation quite late, you are able to apply early on but have to wait for quite a few months for it all to be confirmed. With the University of Helsinki you are only able to choose one option of housing when you apply, either through Hoas or Unihome and from there you could pick from a couple of options e.g.; shared room, apartment or studio. You can look it all up online, but here are more spots of certain types of accommodation for each company.

## Money matters

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

Accommodation was \$406 Euros a month for a room in a shared apartment. My flights were \$3,500 NZD to Helsinki and return to New Zealand. The student Finnish Visa was free but I had to go over to Canberra to get it, so was probably around \$1000 NZD, including flights and accommodation to get the Visa. The insurance I got was \$500 NZD. Food was not too expensive if you shopped around etc. and went to cheaper supermarkets. Travel Card for public transport \$100-ish NZD for the semester.

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

I got a cash passport before I left New Zealand so I could load it with different currencies. You can also transfer more money over online which was handy. I also used my credit card overseas also.

## Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, since I was going to be living in Finland for over 3 months. I had to apply online, was a bit of a process, had to wait to the University of Helsinki approved me, had to get my flights, show that I had enough money in my account to pay for the time I was away, show travel insurance, where I would live etc. After I got that sorted I could then make an appointment with the Finnish Embassy in Canberra (since NZ doesn't have one) and fly over there to sort it. I then got the Student Visa in the mail soon after.

*Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?*

Not sure

## Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

There were many organised activities and clubs provided by the University of Helsinki. During O week there was a clubs day like at Otago so you can go and have a look around. There is also a big student culture within departments, they have their own organisations, parties and events. The overalls they give out in the first semester are a big part of their student life. I would recommend students going over to attend the University of Helsinki to get to get involved with their departmental events and groups, it's really fun and everyone is pretty nice!

The Erasmus parties and events for EU exchange students are really good to get to know other exchange students too from different departments. Even though I wasn't on that type of exchange I was allowed to just go along too.

*What was the university/ city like?*

The University was quite modern and all about thinking for yourself which I liked. There are lots of sports and organisations. The lecturers I had were pretty helpful and I could easily go ask for help if I needed it. Helsinki itself was easy to navigate yourself around after a couple weeks, good public transport and public spaces. Lots of events and things to do and explore. The different departments had Finnish students mentoring their exchange students. It was really good especially during O week.

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

- Take the ferry over to Suomenlinna, an island off the coast of Helsinki. You can use your travel card for the ferry and spend the day walking around the island. Heaps of history associated with the island and it's pretty cute.
- Visit the city of Tallinn, Estonia. You can catch a ferry over and it takes a couple hours. The old town of Tallinn looks like something out of a fairytale. It can be a easy day trip or weekend trip and is not too expensive. This is also where lots of Finnish people buy their alcohol and bring it back over into Helsinki, it's cheap over there.
- There are plenty of museums and churches you can go visit. The Tempelisaari Church (made out rock) is pretty cool and I liked Amos Rex art gallery too.
- Go for a sauna, there are thousands of saunas in Finland. Most apartments and complex buildings will have them.
- Ice Hockey games were a highlight for me! Would definitely recommend going along to a couple games. There are a couple different leagues, like within Finland and against other countries which is cool.
- There are heaps of cute brunch places. Cold meat selections are pretty traditional for a Finnish brunch place but I found Green Hippo Café and El Fant café to be really good and have a similar selection to NZ. Café Regatta is also really cool, it's a wee bit out of the centre of town by the water. You can hire kayaks from there in summer too and cook sausages over fires in winter.

- Lapland is a must do! Save up before you go and book early for December if you can as this is when there will be lots of snow and all the activities should be available e.g. husky sleds, skiing. It can be pretty pricey if you do all the activities but I definitely recommend it, book through Time Travels and there will be other exchange students on the trip. If you're going on exchange first semester try go to Lapland at the start like in Jan and Feb as there will still be snow then.
- All of December there are lots of Christmas markets around Helsinki. Really cool to go to especially since it is dark most the time and there can be soon. Can buy wee souvenirs and glogi (mulled wine).
- The district of Kallio was the best place we found to go for a few drinks, it is cheaper than the centre of town and there are lots of bars.
- The Helsinki Zoo is something you can go have a wee look at if you have a free day. It is on an island on the coast of Helsinki and is pretty cool.
- Linnanmaki amusement park in Helsinki is cool too!!- open certain times. Go for a whole day so you get more rides for your money.
- Go to Ikea! There are two in just out of Helsinki and a good place to buy kitchen and homeware stuff. Recommend to go for a look and for lunch, the meatballs are what they are famous for.
- Sit Sit; traditional Finnish dinner that students run. Involves three courses, drinks, singing, themed costumes and games etc. Pretty typical over there for students, their version of a BYO.
- If you're interested in going to Russia, look through Time Travels too as they have tours for students that gives you a weekend trip visa free. I really enjoyed going to St. Petersburg!

*Any tips for future students?*

- There are cheap lunches available at the campus' around Helsinki. Some of them can be average but everyone goes- it's quite social and you can save your money for other things.
- Get involved in activities and go to as many events as you can! You'll meet heaps more people and have a good time.
- Look for cheap flights to other countries if you want to travel while you're overseas. If you can, try and get your papers in the first few days of the week so you have free time to do things and travel.
- Don't pack heaps of clothes and stuff as there are heaps of cheap clothing stores e.g. H & M over there. There are lots of malls over there too, which are all really good.
- If you go during winter you'll need good boots and a winter jacket (get your jacket over there, more suited for the temperatures).

- Most accommodation places come furnished but they do not have plates, cups and cutlery etc. I did not realise this until I got there. Ikea and cheap stores like Flying Tiger and Tokmanni (like the Warehouse ish) have homeware bits and bobs there.
- Really recommend getting a Travel Card, it lets you use public transport in Helsinki and surrounding districts- trams, buses, trains and the Suomenlinna ferry. I think it cost me around \$100 for the whole semester. The HSL app is really handy too!
- If you want to learn the Finnish language I believe there are courses available in Helsinki through different organisations and online. That is a good option if you want to learn but do not want to take a paper at the University.
- If you need to go to the doctors while you're in Helsinki I definitely recommend going through the University to the public doctor. It is way cheaper than the private hospitals but can take longer to get an appointment.
- Grab a SIM card (or you'll get given one from Hoas if you're with them) and go to a R-Kiosk (convenience stores which are everywhere) and ask for the \$19 euro data pack. It gives you unlimited data for the month which was so good! I found that I didn't need calls or anything and could just message/call people on messenger or WhatsApp.
- Don't get offended if Finnish people are a bit quiet and stand offish. They can take a while to warm up to you. I was use to saying hello/smiling to everyone I passed on the street at home and that's not the norm over there.
- I took a multi plug power board with me over to Helsinki and it was so super handy so I could charge all my NZ devices.

## Overall Experience

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

Helsinki was unreal! I never could have prepared myself for what I was going to experience and who I was going to meet. The people were the best part! It was so cool getting to know other exchange students, bonding with them and traveling around together. I enjoyed different lecturers and the topics they had to offer. The city itself was so pretty, lots of history and things to do. The culture over there is very different to that of our culture in New Zealand. The Finnish people are generally quite quiet and conservative which I found a wee bit hard to adjust to at the start as people would always look at me due to my accent. I really enjoyed meeting new people and getting amongst the different traditions.

I would definitely recommend a semester abroad at the University of Helsinki, especially if you're looking for somewhere that is completely different to New Zealand- that has lots of culture, history and lots of traditions. A large proportion Finnish people speak English and I never had any issues at the University day to day. I found the University and the staff there really helpful and there were lots of activities and events available to exchange students. I had a great time and would 10/10 would do it all again.





**In the Senate Square in front of the Helsinki Cathedral**



**Railway square in the city centre of Helsinki**



**At the Husky farm in Lapland**



**Nicolle Vincent and I in Lapland, Finland.**





**By the Arctic Ocean in Norway**



**Christmas market in Helsinki**





Café Regatta in Helsinki