



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

Host University	University of Helsinki – Finland
Semester & Year of Exchange	Semester 2, 2022
Otago degree(s)	Bachelor of Arts
Major(s)	Education

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

Course title	Language of instruction	Otago equivalent
STEP: Psychology of development and learning	English	4
Finnish Education System	English	4
Finnish School and Subject Education	English	5
Social Justice and Diversities in Education	English	4
Attachment: Theory, methods, and intervention	English	1

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

Any comments about these papers?

I absolutely loved the discussions, especially during the Social Justice and Diversities course. The class was with people from all around the world, consisting of international degree students and other exchange students. It was a very international environment and very insightful to learn about new knowledge about education, its progress, and how the system works in different countries. Another course that I specifically enjoyed was the Finnish education system course. It felt like having an insider's breakdown on what makes the Finnish education system as great as the internet makes it to be. I got to discover it myself, learning the facts on what makes them so great. Reflecting back on it though, I wouldn't say it's much different than the education here in New Zealand (at least of what I know of). I got a 1 in the Attachment Theory class because during the final exam I didn't come as something happened back home and I was in a grieving period. Unfortunately it was the only way for them to grade my participation, they didn't offer retakes either.

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

It was very different. I'm not sure if it's because I went as an exchange student instead of a degree student, but they didn't really have tutorials like Otago does. Instead, the classes could run on so long. I had a class that ran on from 2pm until 6pm each session. All the classes I've had in Otago are only 50-minute long. This specific class was only once every two weeks though. Perhaps there is no tutorial because they decided to pile everything into one long session. I didn't think it was effective though. Because it was packed as a "lecture", the students weren't as interactive during the discussions that we have. I also noticed people losing interest or not focusing on the lecture anymore during the second-half of it (after having a 30-minute break).

I feel like the grading system is also way lighter than Otago. In most of my papers in Otago it consists of 2 assignments at least, and a final exam. In Helsinki, there was only one final form of the assignment in the entirety of the course. For example, for the Social Justice and Diversities course we only had to make a video as a group and that was it. We did have to make like two posters and keeping a discussion going in a form, but that was it. It felt very light to me. Not sure how their grading system works.

Accommodation

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

I had stayed in a student apartment that was specifically for exchange students. It was a very cool experience as again, I got to meet and befriend people from all around the world with different cultures than mine. It was nice staying at a student apartment especially as an exchange student, because I knew everyone was starting anew. Unfortunately it's an old building. Everything inside was fine though, except maybe their heating system was central. That, and it was an old style heater too. It wasn't really effective to keep me warm. I loved everything else though. I stayed in a flat, shared with 5 other people who were all on an exchange. Quite a lot of people, but it was bearable since the shared parts are just the toilet and the kitchen area. It was also very strategic too location wise, it wasn't downtown but it lowkey felt like it. Everything was within a walking distance and it was near the bus, tram, and train stops. The rent price was reasonable too for Finland, not too expensive. I'd say it was average especially since it was furnished.

Money matters

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

- Visa fee: roughly \$600-700
- Insurance: roughly \$700-800
- Flight (one way from Jakarta to Helsinki): roughly \$1,250
- Accommodation per month: \$751 (433 Euros)
- Grocery shopping: \$52 every 2 weeks (around 27-30 Euros)

I think having around 250-300 Euros per month would make you very comfortable. Depending on your life style but you can survive too with 200 (if I remember it correctly). It wasn't comfortable though.

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

At the start I had cash and a credit card. After a couple of days I opened a Revolut account. I would definitely recommend students going on an exchange around Europe to open a Revolut account as it is a quite big thing there. Most shops are already cashless, and there will be the foreign transaction fees if you use the credit card. Revolut is tap-less, so you can pay with it anywhere since most of their payment methods has the tap-less payment sign. Revolut is highly efficient because it is accessible from your phone, you don't need to have the physical card to start using it. Refilling the money is also an easy process, you can just top it up from your bank account (put in your bank details, and the money goes into your Revolut account immediately with a credit card).

Visas & Insurance

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

Yes, I had to apply for a Schengen visa. The process was really easy and took super-fast to be proceed. It took 2 weeks for me to get an appointment from the Finnish embassy after submitting it. Immediately after confirming my identity to the office, less than 24 hours after the appointment I got the confirmation that my visa had been approved.

I did and completed the visa application form online. It didn't ask for much, it had only asked for the basic information and documents about yourself, an acceptance letter from the host university, proof of having enough finances during my stay, and proof of having an insurance.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

No, I didn't get asked by my host university. It was the requirements from the government to have an insurance in prior.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

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

University of Helsinki had a lot of events going on for their students. I'm not too sure about the availability of the clubs though. I was mainly exposed to the Master's students' academic settings as I had chosen to study in English. I was more exposed to the international community instead of the locals. On top of that, Finnish people love to keep to themselves too.

What was the university/ city like?

Instead of being in one big area like Otago, the university buildings were separated in different areas of the city. It was classified based on the faculties. Hence why classes were mostly in the same building, from one building to another it was only around 5 minutes. The city itself was definitely more metropolitan compared to Dunedin. But it didn't feel like a capital city though, maybe because there was not that many people. It was quite rare to see a bunch of people in the same place at the same time. I loved Helsinki though it had a lot of public transportation options, you can go almost anywhere.

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

Definitely should explore the nature, it's very pretty. Should explore the little islands too, the most popular one is Suomenlinna. I went to Vallisaari too, this one is uninhibited. Very touristy, but it's very worth it to go up north to Lapland to catch the Northern Lights (I didn't catch any though unfortunately, it was cloudy). If you do end up going to Lapland, I wouldn't recommend going with the bus. It's cheaper, yes, but my friends said it was uncomfortable spending hours sitting on the bus. I personally went there alone, so I took the infamous sleeper train. It was super cool! A bit pricey but it was a once in a lifetime experience. You get your own cabin and a bed, in the fancier one you can even go and take a shower. I would also recommend to go to Tampere and Turku, it took me around 2 hours to reach Tampere from Helsinki by train. Going to Turku will take longer though. There isn't much to do in Tampere, you can explore everything in one day but it's quite famous. You can relax a bit in Turku though as it's farther, and they have more things to do too.

For the activities I would recommend to go berry picking, they are available during the summer. And also picking sunflowers! The food I would recommend to try is their salmon soup, it was very tasty. They also have good pastries too, I absolutely loved their cinnamon rolls. Even the store-made ones (not from bakeries specifically) were good. You can try reindeer meat too if you want too, my friend said it was chewy and very soft. I didn't try it though, didn't have the heart to.

They have a ton of cute cafes too. It's definitely worth to check out a few. I do recommend going to the oldest café in town, it's called Ekberg. Cute place. I also loved the set up for The Ounce (a tea place) it was old style, and worth the visit. They have nice museums too, all of the museums in town is free every first Friday of the month if I'm not mistaken.

Any tips for future students?

Put yourself out there!!! Try to bound and blend in with everyone. You will have time to do so if you arrive at least 2 weeks before the semester starts. Explore the city and familiarize yourself around it. Don't be scared to try new things! Anything, even things that you wouldn't do back home. It's kind of like a once in a lifetime experience. I would say it's better to regret doing it while you're still there, rather than be in regret back home for not doing certain things you wanted to do but didn't have the guts to.

Overall Experience

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

When I came to Helsinki it was my first time living alone, I had known no one too, zero relatives. Going there in general was definitely a life changing experience for me. I loved it, meeting and befriending people. Doing leisure things that I probably wouldn't do back home.

Thinking back on it now it felt like a dream. I absolutely loved the experience, made some good friends along the way too. I went to cities, museums, cute cafes, explored the nature too. Went in the woods when the sun already went down, again, definitely something I wouldn't do back home. I tried sauna for the first time). I went to Lapland alone, and did the things that I've wanted to do since I was little. I also got to experience crazy cold weather. I think I was faced with a -18C once. There had just been a snowstorm in Helsinki, hence the low temperature. It was still early December at the time. I remember I was outside too, walking, I wanted to get home as soon as possible. I've never seen snow that thick my whole life. It was also bizarre to see the sun not going up until 10am but its already dark

again by 2/3pm. And when the sun is 'up' it's not even actually sunny. The sun was just there, hidden by the clouds. So it was kind of just like grey skies. Would've loved to experience the midnight sun too.

One of the things that stood out was when I joined this event held by the university. I don't remember what it's called now, but we all dressed up as a group (following the theme for the year). It's kind of like the show Amazing Race. You go to stop points and collect points.

1. This was in Lapland!



2. The event/race I mentioned



3. Finnish Independence Day, the ending point was held at the iconic Helsinki Cathedral

