

Louvain

2013 Full Year

BCom ACCT FINC BA FREN

Basically Louvain is a student campus Uni. There was a rift between the Flemish and French parts of the Uni 30 years ago so they just split it in two. The French part relocated and created a purpose-built town from scratch. As such it's basically the ideal place to go for an exchange. The centre is a pedestrian campus and the furthest you'll have to walk to Uni is 10 mins. The Belgians also have student groups called cercles and regionals which run the nightlife and make it a super casual, super cheap and super fun party town, but more about that later.

Maybe the whole exchange thing seems complicated to you now but it's actually made really easy. Graeme France is amazing and will make sure you know what you need to do.

Who should go?

I'd say anyone and everyone. Belgium is famous for beer, chocolate, waffles, French fries, and mussels. And of course Jean-Claude Van Damme - the mussels from Brussels.

So if you like any or all of these, it could be the place for you!

Student nightlife runs throughout the week, then you travel Europe on the weekends. It's a perfect setup. Sort of like Dunedin taken to the next level. Then one more. Best party town I've seen.

I know this Uni is one that says you should know some French before you go, but a lot of exchange students I met there knew literally Bonjour, Baguette and Au revoir when they arrived. Full English courses are available, so there's no reason why you shouldn't go. As part of the exchange you can do French courses during the term for free, just make sure they're in your learning agreement to make it simpler.

Arrival

I arrived on a Tuesday, moved into accommodation on the Wednesday, with a compulsory meeting for exchange students on the Friday and courses starting on the Monday (6 days after I arrived). I think this was a good time to arrive.

So ideally you'll find your way to Brussels, and from there you just get a train to Louvain-La-Neuve (not Leuven; that's a different place). People are very friendly so just ask a Belgian to direct you.

You should contact 'kot erasmus' before-hand to ask if you can stay a couple of nights at the start whilst your accom gets sorted. It's essentially a 16 person flat which has dorm rooms they open at the start of each semester for exchange students. Cost is 5 euros a night, and they have parties there for the first week or so where you'll meet all the exchange students and some Belgians too.

I think this is the best way to meet everyone else who is in the same boat as you. Many of them will end up being your best friends who you travel with etc.

In Europe they call exchange students 'Erasmus' after the European exchange program. 'kot' means student flat. So kot Erasmus is a flat especially for exchange students. For the first week it has drinks/party in the evenings which has all you can drink beers for 2 euros.

Accommodation

In Louvain most students live in "kots" which are student flats usually with around 8 people. They're in 3 floor apartment buildings and are heated with radiators so they're always warm. The kots are a great way to meet some Belgians. There will also probably be a couple of other exchange students in with you.

Usually people cook by themselves but you will have occasional flat dinners which are heaps of fun. I also found I ended up eating with friends all over the place. Everyone wants to show off their home countries cuisine, which is sensational.

Application for the university accommodation (the 'kots') is done separately from enrolment in the uni. It is done by the accommodation office, called UCL Logements. Application for it should be sent separately to the UCL logements office.

My application didn't arrive/ got lost, but I had emailed in advance to confirm so they found me accommodation anyway, and on the same day.

So I would send a confirmation email to check they've got your application for accommodation.

It's also worth starting a bank account while you're there to pay rent from. It's totally free for under 25s. go to BNP Paribas or ING. They're on the main square, impossible to miss.

Weather

Min -2 or 3 in Jan. Cloudy in winter. But inside it's always toasty. Heating is included in rent so you'll be warm as. Everywhere is a couple minutes' walk so you don't have to be outside in the cold. It gets warmer and sunnier soon. Basically don't let the European winter put you off. You'll be warm and healthy.

Study

Europe works on ECT credits. Usually courses are worth 5 credits and you need to do 30 credits a semester. This means 6 courses. Don't worry! They're smaller than ours so it equates very well. It also helps that your first language is English. A lot of the courses are in English so you've got a big advantage over everyone else who is learning in a foreign language.

As far as courses go, get as many as possible signed off on your Otago learning agreement! That way you will be able to pick and choose what you like when you get there, and what fits best with your travelling plans.

I studied Finance, Accounting and French. It's a great university for business stuff, especially finance – the courses are good for cross crediting back to Otago. Obviously it's great if you want to learn French too.

I finished my studies over there, so all my papers cross credited to 300 level papers back here. They are Masters level courses but are equivalent to our 300 level.

As far as the French courses go, the B2 level course is a good level for FREN333 - FREN334, and the C1 course for FREN335 – FREN 336 level

Any other questions about courses, email me.

Social Life

In the very beginning, go to kot Erasmus in the evenings, and on the ESN (Erasmus student network) organized events. They are there to make sure you have a good time and meet some of the hundreds of exchange students there. But don't worry you'll also meet lots of Belgians.

Louvain is sort of like a crazier, better version of Otago. It's even more compact, a purpose built student town, with a really cool vibe. Students often party on weeknights, then the Belgians go home for the weekends which is ideal as you can head off travelling around Europe without missing out on anything.

In my opinion the best and most authentic places to go out are the cercles/regionales. A cercle is a student group from one of the faculties. E.g. cercle de droit (law cercle). They run the bars which are open to all students. Regionales are the same thing for an area/town of Belgium. I ended up joining l'Enghiennoise, which is obviously the best. Make sure you tell all the other ones that. They love it.

Members are easy to spot because they'll be in special hats with badges on them. If you mention you're from NZ they might even shout you one.

Beers cost 1 euro, and people dress down to go. Gumboots and a hoodie style. It's all about having fun and dancing. Its super friendly, so no bouncers, no i.d. , no trouble, just happy students.

Oh and McDonalds sells beers.

Other things to know; Kot-a-projets are flats with certain themes, for example theres "kotstume" which has a huge dress up room so you can rent super cheap stuff for costume parties. Ask the people at kot Erasmus if you need something and they've got a big list of all the kot-a-projets.

Cost

UCL logements, the university accom, costs just under 300 euros per month, including heating and water. When I was there this equated to 500nz per month, which is very reasonable. You rent for 5 months a semester.

Electricity and internet is very cheap (split between 8 people, and with no heating costs).

Food costs are similar to NZ except for fresh meat which is about 1.5 or 2 times the prices of NZ. A kilo of mince costs 8 or 9 euros. Steak is way too expenny. Frozen chicken etc is really cheap though. Canned/dry goods and chocolate are cheaper than NZ. So I guess it balances out pretty well.

Alcohol is a lot cheaper, the cheapest being about \$1.30nz per litre of beer in the super market. Wine and liquor are also cheap.

At the student bars, a beer is 1 euro. There are also beer cafés where you can try all the flash Belgian beers.

15 euro/month for cell phone. Washing costs about 4 euro a load at the Laundromat.

Students in Belgium can buy a gopass which gives you 10 trips to anywhere in Belgium for 50 euros. This makes exploring Belgium very affordable.

There is also a campus pass for about 7euros which will give you 10 trips to one specified city. i.e. Brussels so you can go check it out, party etc.

Travel

Louvain is 40 mins from Brussels, the center of Europe.

Low cost airlines make travel in Europe incredibly cheap and easy. Brussels Charleroi (not actually in Brussels) is one of the main airports for these airlines. It's about 90 mins on public transport from Louvain, and you could get a return flight to Barcelona for 40 euros if you book abit in advance.

A lot of Erasmus (exchange students) just search for cheap destinations a couple of weeks in advance and head off for a long weekend. This is helped by the fact that the management school (commerce) doesn't really do Fridays, and sometimes not Mondays. Choose your courses well.

Personally, I travelled to heaps of countries using the cheap airlines and stayed in a mix of backpackers, new friends' homes, and sometimes a bunch of us rented houses for a big party weekend in Croatia or Barcelona. Just go nuts, it's awesome!

I was full year so I had summer holidays from June to September and it was amazing. Summer in Europe is incredible, with music festivals everywhere and everyone lives in the streets. It's amazing. I spent a lot of it visiting friends from my first semester in their home cities, and road tripping to visit others etc. it was amazing. Greek Islands, Italy, Croatia, Portugal, Spain, France... epic!

It'll be the best year of your life. Amp it.