

University of St. Gallen
2014: Semester Two
BCOM: Economics, LLB: Law

My semester at the University of St. Gallen was exciting and it is certainly a unique and challenging place to go for an exchange. I was in the fortunate position that this was my second exchange of the year so I had already been travelling for eight months when I arrived.

The Town

The town of St. Gallen is located approximately one hour to the east of Zurich and 20 minutes from the Swiss border with Germany. It is a small town with only 70,000 people. In this sense it is similar to Dunedin because you can walk



The town of St. Gallen

everywhere for university, parties etc and all the students flats and bars are located in roughly the same area. The town is beautiful and quite modern but around the town itself there is not much to do. However there are some mountains nearby where you can view the borders of Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Lake Constance. Most people in the town speak a decent amount of English so if

you have limited German language skills (like me) then you can still fairly easily get by. The language spoken in the town is Swiss-German, which according to the native German speakers I met, is a German dialect that even they struggled to understand most of the time.

Accommodation

Most of the exchange students organized their accommodation through the university accommodation office. You need to pay an administration fee of 250 CHF (Swiss Franks) for this and you don't always have a choice over who you live with or the location of your apartment. I was lucky in that I met a St. Gallen student on my first exchange so he was able to sort me out an apartment through a St. Gallen students Facebook page (called 'Sharing is Caring'). This meant I didn't have to pay the administration fee and ended up living in an apartment close to the centre of the city. My rent was about average for Switzerland and was 550 CHF per month (\$715 NZD). However, this did not include internet and power. My apartment had three rooms and was of very high quality compared to a Dunedin flat and was also very warm even in the middle of winter. There was one big apartment called B32 with about 15 people living in it. This contained mainly exchange students and was the place that most of the parties were held.

So if you want to live in a party place while living in St. Gallen then apply for this place through the accommodation office.

Money, Visas & Insurance

Switzerland was overall a very expensive place to live compared to Dunedin or the other exchange destinations in Europe. This meant I brought most of my food from the supermarkets and did a lot of home cooking in the apartment. It is incredibly expensive to eat out or buy drinks at bars. Meat is especially expensive because Switzerland is not part of the EU so they cannot import meat cheaply. One option some of the students take is to travel to Constance in Germany, which is about one hour away, to do their grocery shopping where it is much cheaper.

Being from NZ we do not need to get a visa to study in Switzerland but we do need a residents permit. When you arrive in Switzerland you need to go to the town hall and register for a residents permit which cost you 96 CHF. It is also Swiss law to have health insurance for your time in the country. I had a problem with this because my insurance policy from NZ was not deemed comprehensive enough under Swiss law so I had to take out an extra insurance policy for my time in Switzerland. It would be a good idea to find out the exact requirements under Swiss law before taking out any insurance policy. This will help you to avoid having to take out an extra policy once you arrive.

Academic & Exams



The University of St. Gallen

The University of St. Gallen is highly regarded world wide, especially in the German speaking community. It is a small University with only 7,000 students and is located on top of a hill so you get a tough workout walking up there every day. It is predominately a business school but also offers law and international relations. There are plenty of companies and prospective employers coming into the University

for interviews and functions. Therefore, you see a lot of students dressed up smartly or in suits, which gives the University a more formal feel. Since it is a top business school most of the students are male with only about 30% being female.

In order to take the course that you want you need to go through a bidding process. This was less complicated than I thought and I was able to attend all the classes I wanted to take. The University does a good job of getting in touch with you about the bidding process and how it works. The most important thing is to

make sure you bid for you classes in the first round of bidding. Most exchange students I talked to received all the classes they wanted to.

The University is bilingual in German and English, so there are plenty of courses available in English. For business students you will have plenty of options to fit your requirements including at masters level. During my time there I took three masters economics classes, two European law classes and a second year marketing class. All of these were quite challenging, especially the master classes, and probably at a higher level than what is expected at Otago. I found it difficult to know exactly what was required for each class and there were plenty of group assignments and presentations. The St. Gallen grading scale is from one to six and you need at least a four to pass. Also, almost all of my exams were oral exams which was another thing to get used to. If you are at St. Gallen in the autumn semester then exchange students have the option to take all their exams (called decentral exams) before Christmas. This means all of your exams are during the last two weeks of class, making the last few weeks of the exchange very busy. However this does give you the option to travel more around Europe or go back home for Christmas.

Transport

Since St. Gallen is a small town, like Dunedin, the best form of transport around the town is by foot. At the very most you will have a 15-minute walk to get anywhere so this makes it fairly easy to get around. In terms of travelling out of St. Gallen, to other parts of Europe, the two cheapest and easiest ways would be by train or bus. The train station is located in the middle of the city and it is easy to book tickets from there, however these tickets can be quite pricy if brought at short notice or during peak times. A cheaper option would be to travel by bus and bus companies to look out for are 'Flix Bus' or 'Student Agency'. For example, I was able to get a return bus to Munich for 27 euros. A good website to look at for buses around Europe is 'Bus Bud' which tells you the cheapest bus route for your planned destination!

What to do

The best thing you can do around St. Gallen is to get involved in the buddy system at the University. This is where you are paired up with a regular St. Gallen student who will show you around and answer any questions you have. There are also plenty of buddy system events on during the semester such as fondue night, pub crawls, toga parties, ice skating, skiing, hiking, weekend trips to cities and many more. All of these events are organized through the buddy system Facebook page which you are added to once you join the buddy system. The week before class starts there is an orientation week for exchange students with various organized events which provide a great opportunity to meet other exchange students and make friends for the semester. Another opportunity the University provides is a two-week intensive German language course before the semester starts. I did not do this but from talking to the exchange students it sounded like a great opportunity to meet people before the semester began and also get ahead with their German.

If you are in St. Gallen in the autumn semester another great thing to do is go to the OLMA festival. This is a ten-day cultural festival held in St. Gallen and is a great way to try some of the traditional Swiss food. There are various tents with different themes and plenty of food and drink samples around the place. There is also a pig race on every day at 4pm which is well worth a watch for a bit of a laugh. In the lead up to Christmas the Christmas markets start to appear and these are a great way to buy some classical Swiss gifts and also try drinking the traditional 'hot wine' (a perfect thing to warm you up when it is zero degrees).

The University has amazing gym facilities available to students. Almost any sport



you can think of is available and all you have to do is sign up online to attend most of them for free. I ended up taking a Monday night cardio class which was a good way to break up the week and meet some new people. I also played a lot of soccer on the artificial turf next to the gym.

St. Gallen Football Team

Travel

The semester at St. Gallen is only 12 weeks long so there is plenty of time to travel before or after. The semester is divided up into two six-week blocks split by a two-week break. This break is ideal to travel in if you are lucky enough not to have any class and during this I travelled to Berlin, Cologne, London and Prague. These are all cities that I would recommend travelling to if you have the time. During the semester I went on a number of weekend trips with other exchange students. A trip to Constance in Germany is well worth going on and I also went to Munich for the famous Oktoberfest, which was amazing and I would highly recommend. A lot of people went on trips around Switzerland to places such as Zurich, Basel, Geneva and Lucerne.

However, the best trip I went on was in the second half of the semester where I went to Rome for a University sports meeting. I played in the soccer team but there were plenty of other sports to compete in such as tennis, futsal, basketball, athletics, volleyball and cheerleading. It was more of a social-competitive tournament and there were about 40 Universities attending so there were fun events on at night as well. We also managed to have one day to explore Rome, another city well worth visiting.

Overall

I had a fun but challenging semester in St. Gallen. The University is well regarded and will look great on your CV but be prepared for some challenging classes. However, overall the challenges presented are worth taking on and you will meet

some very interesting and well-connected people during your exchange. The opportunities to travel around Europe before, during or after the exchange really add to the experience. I would recommend St. Gallen to business students who want to study at a well-regarded business school, improve their German and are interested in travelling around Europe.