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Warsaw School of Economics, Poland

Semester 1, 2016

Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Marketing Management

It is so hard to put into words the amazing experience I had on exchange at Warsaw School of Economics... absolutely life changing, once in a lifetime opportunity, the best way to go abroad, unbelievable! Poland is a fantastic country to live and not only because it is one of the cheapest countries to live in Europe, but because it has a rich history, is in the centre of Europe, and provides a unique experience through different culture and language. Warsaw is a vibrant city and with a population of nearly 2 million it has nearly 10 large universities attracting a large number of domestic and international students. Warsaw School of Economics is considered a very prestigious school in Central Europe and the international program was noted by many as one of the best in Europe. I made friends from all over the world, was taught by some outstanding professors, and gained a far greater understanding of international organisations and markets.

Culture/Language

Polish people are as a whole very nice people and willing to help where they can. The only trouble you might run into is the lack of English speaking people in the older generation (with the exception of University staff who generally have great English)... But I saw this as part of the experience and it didn't create too many difficulties! It surprises you how much you can say with body language, gestures and a lot of pointing! You will be assigned a buddy by the University and I'd make sure you stay in touch with them before you arrive so that they can give you a hand in your first week, always handy to have a translator around the first few days. Try and learn as much Polish as you can and remember Polish people appreciate it when you try, even if you don't say things perfect every time! Try and learn at least hello, please, excuse me, and thank you – it's easy when you're over there to pick up the basics but very hard to learn the language at a conversational level... it's the third hardest language in the world. All the young people and advisors and professors at University speak English so don't stress if you aren't fluent when you arrive.

The cultural workshop in orientation week is a must! Gives you a chance to not only learn how the Polish culture differs but also how the cultures of all the other exchange students differs, it is important to be aware that some things we do in NZ are a bit strange to other cultures and vice versa... For example, I walked around the dormitory with no shoes on because it was very warm inside and learnt pretty quick that this was considered a big no no in some cultures!! Don't worry though because that is one of my big takeaways from the experience; the ability to absorb and make small adjustments taking into account other peoples important cultural norms and the awareness that people will do the same for you. By the end of exchange we were able to mimic and have fun with each others cultural differences and knowing that we understood each other so well by the end realised what good, life long friends we had made.

Money Matters

I know that this was a big part of the consideration process when planning my exchange and I'm sure it will be important to many considering applying. Poland is a very affordable option for exchange and if you stay in the students dorms won't pay more than about \$800 (NZD) for your

full semester of accommodation; this includes power, internet, and facilities for cooking and showering etc. Not only are your accommodation costs low but virtually everything in Poland is significantly cheaper than New Zealand. My average grocery bill for 2 weeks of food was 90PLN (\$30NZD), a large kebab (a popular takeaway) is 10PLN (\$3.50NZD), and you can buy a large bottle or can of beer for 3PLN (\$1NZD). The transport system is amazing in Warsaw, and throughout Poland, and the 3 month pass costs about \$40NZD, giving you unlimited use of local trains, trams, and buses.

A big question I had myself before going was how to manage money in Poland. There are fees for getting cash out using your NZ cards in Poland and to make some of the payments required on arrival (for accommodation and student ID) it is easier to have a Polish bank account. I went with Millenium bank and they were great! No fees associated and more often than not had someone who could speak English at the bank – highly recommend doing the same.

Student Life

Classes

Students at Warsaw School of Economics consider the classes to be quite hard but fortunately for international students classes in English are considered to be extremely easy in comparison with many other exchange universities. It can seem daunting when applying as you have to take around 10 classes (compared with the 3 or 4 at Otago), and though you probably do spend more time in class, there is a lot less assessment in the way of large projects to complete. For most classes you will get marks for attendance and participating in class discussion, complete a presentation, and have a final exam. You also get two attempts at the final exam!! Make the most of that and use it as an opportunity to get the best grades possible, that way your transcript will look great! If you do miss some classes it is easy enough to catch up but it is important to let your professor know so that you can catch up when you're back.

Classes I would recommend (advice coming from a marketing student)

- Marketing of places
- International Marketing
- Global Marketing
- Services Marketing
- Market Research (interesting and easy to get credit from participation)
- Health Economics (fun class and amazing professor)
- International organisations (very interesting!)
- Business Informatics

Socialising/student activities

As mentioned Warsaw School of Economics have one of the best international programs in Europe and this comes down to how active the ESN (exchange student network) team are. They organise awesome events every day of orientation week and then every couple of weeks throughout the semester. This means that you have endless opportunities to meet new people and get to know the city. They also organise trips so that you can see the hot spots of Poland – these trips are based around seeing the history and also experiencing the different night life. There is a big mixture of people on exchange and it is interesting and so much fun to share the time with such different cultures and personalities. Because of the broad range of events you end up finding a nice group of people who share similar interests with you but the program is also great in that it

brings the broader exchange community together. While on exchange the annual Erasmus (exchange) conference was held in Warsaw and students on exchange all through Europe came to Warsaw for a weekend full of events, an amazing experience! Some of my friends took off for the Erasmus spring break in Croatia too! Being on the exchange program in Europe gives you access to all of these events providing an almost overwhelming number of opportunities to explore and meet new people.

Recommendations

3 best places to explore in Poland

- Krakow – visit Auschwitz and the Salt Mines!
- Gdansk, Sopot, and Gdynia – Sea port towns, absolutely beautiful in summer
- Zakopane – MUST SEE in summer (for hiking) and winter (for skiing)

5 best places to eat (because I couldn't pick 3)

- Charlotte – amazing French breakfast for around 15PLN – MUST try the white chocolate spread and the mixed omelette
- Aioli – simply the best breakfast you will ever have! Go before midday and get breakfast for 1PLN with a coffee
- A milk bar (bar *mleczny*) – traditional polish food (also worth looking into the history of milk bars – really interesting!)
- U Szwejka – Schnitzel bar where you get a dinner plate sized Schnitzel, fries, salad, and 1 litre of beer for around 23PLN (\$8NZD)
- Ali Baba Kebab – Kebabs are EVERYWHERE in Europe but this is by far the best I have had

3 best places to get a cold beverage

- Park Klub – the student bar where on Wednesday's you get unlimited beer for 10PLN
- Pawiliony – a group of 20 small bars in a small courtyard, very popular place and a great place to talk with friendly locals
- The Marriot Hotel – you can go to the top floor, buy a cocktail, and have an amazing view of the city

3 best attractions

- Lazienki park – 76 hectare park in the middle of Warsaw – home to a palace, Chopin concerts, and many squirrels (who will come say hello if you bring nuts)
- Old Town – I could never spend enough time in Old Town; it is beautiful, full of history and full of life!
- Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews – a compelling explanation of the stories of some of Poland's Jewish community through WWII

Poland is absolutely amazing! I cannot wait to go back and explore again one day soon!

