

Semester two 2015 exchange to Uppsala!

Accommodation

I spent my Swedish semester in a housing complex called Sernanders vag. This is the largest of the student housing, and definitely the best for the international student lifestyle! Rooms are large (but they are everywhere so don't worry about that) and each comes with a private bathroom. Kitchen and living area are shared in a corridor of 12, but don't be put off by this!! Also known as Flogsta, this place has everything you could need while you're away! People everywhere, both Swedes and internationals, who are mostly friendly and excited to make new friends. Parties are going on constantly as well as easy gatherings between smaller groups of friends. Once you arrive you'll notice it seems like EVERYONE lives in Flogsta, so my advice is not to miss out!!

The only issue with Flogsta is the distance from the centre and uni (but this will vary depending on your campus). It is further out of the city, but by bike this isn't really an issue! I was able to bike right throughout my stay (Aug – Jan) but chose to take the bus on some winter evenings due to the snow and ice!! The next best choice for students more concerned about comfort and a close location, look no further than Rackabersgatan. This is really close and a bit nicer as you share with just 4 other people! But there is a shared bathroom (unlike Flogsta) and you'll probably have to bike to Flogsta for parties and meet ups anyways! In my opinion the other options aren't really worth looking at if you're wanting to embrace the international experience!!

Money matters

Sweden is expensive. This is something people will be telling you when you consider where to go on your exchange, but please also remember that New Zealand is expensive too! Accommodation is more expensive here than a typical Dunedin flat with all the bills. I paid around \$175 each week for accommodation, internet and power. Food in Sweden is a little more expensive than at home, but shopping to the specials can help with this. The best supermarket in town ICA vast is located right next to Flogsta – this is where you should shop and get awesome specials! Sticking to the discounted stuff will save you a lot. Alcohol in Sweden is the most expensive aspect of student life, and I recommend that you stock up in duty free on your way here! (NOT THE SWEDISH DUTY FREE). Another really fun and popular trip to do is going to Tallinn, Riga and Helsinki on a cruise to stock up on alcohol and of course to tick another beautiful country off of your list. If you are into partying a lot then join the student nations known for their parties (i.e. Snerikes, Stockholms and Varmlands) because going there without membership will cost you! Some of my friends joined two nations, which allowed them to save money in entrance fees (which are usually between 40-80SEK).

The Swedish government recommends you have a minimum of 8000SEK per month while you are in Sweden to live off, and I would say this is actually a pretty good guide. I budgeted for \$350 a week which was to include accommodation, food and alcohol, occasional meals out, clothes, university supplies, transport and fika. YES Swedish fika will probably be a decent chunk of your budget! It also includes occasional trips to Stockholm or other areas near to Uppsala. My budget wasn't very strict and I certainly could have spent less!! So just be aware of your accommodation costs, how much you would usually spend on essentials, and then a bit of a buffer.

Academics/course load

First off I am a BSc student who studies neuroscience, so at home my schedule is usually pretty full. Chose courses you like and are interested in (duh). That's what I did, and although I didn't have as much time off as some of my friends I enjoyed my semester a lot. Just like at home, biology courses have a lot of contact time. If you are really there to travel then try to take some of the courses that are clearly aimed at exchange students (courses about Sweden) as well as those within your division. I found uni in Sweden very different to home, with small classes and a lot of contact time with the lecturers and lab demonstrators. This is really nice, but also gives a much different structure to Otago courses so be ready for change.

Transportation

BIKE! Buy a bike as soon as you can. If you don't want to bike then your life in Uppsala will be hard. Buses are frequent and get you most of the places you want to go, but biking is easier, cheaper, faster! Try to buy a bike off of an outgoing student because it's cheaper this way, but the second hand bike stores are also good enough (but will no doubt charge you more than they should). I bought my bike for 950SEK which is on the pricey end (I got it from a second hand bike store) and then sold it on for 650SEK when I left. Lock your bike or it will be stolen (this is about the only form of theft in Uppsala).

Walking is of course an option but not a very good one – Uppsala is very spread out! You can get a month long bus pass at a student price for around 550SEK which will do the job in lieu of a bike, or in the depths of winter.

Weather

I went to Sweden in the autumn semester which I think gave me the perfect chance to adjust to Swedish weather! We arrived at the end of summer where the days are beautiful, sunny, but cool (around 15-20) and from there the sun said its goodbyes and the days rapidly grow darker and colder. As long as you get yourself good footwear and a good jacket, Sweden will be kind to you. It's really not as bad as it seems, we live in Dunedin after all! It's always pretty warm inside even in the student accommodation, so outer layers are the most important. At its coldest in Uppsala it got to around -20 and although not pleasant for extended periods of time, it's easy enough to deal with. Just don't forget your legs will be cold too, but tights or thermals underneath your jeans will do the job. Be aware that some students can't stand the long hours of darkness that well, and if you start to feel sad or moody then get outside whenever you can in daylight hours!!

Eating

Food in Sweden is not that different to home, but with a bit more moose and reindeer on the menu. Eating out in Sweden is really expensive and I only went to a restaurant once during my entire stay. However, the student nations all run pubs and some lunches which offer reasonably priced and decent food (mainly burgers) and eating here can be great fun with friends! Max is Sweden's very own version of McDonalds and its pretty good, please eat here at least once. Traditional Swedish food isn't that exciting to be honest and you aren't likely to eat a lot of it, but make sure you try it!! Swedish meatballs, mashed potato and lingonberry jam are good and easy. Mouse or reindeer stew is much harder to come by but great to try. I don't like blood pudding or salty liquorice but these too are quintessentially Swedish.

I talked a bit about eating at home already, and the key message is figure out which supermarket near you is cheaper! They vary quite a lot, and ICA vast is the cheapest one for sure!!

Places to visit

There is a lot to see in Sweden, and I regret I didn't do more travelling within! My favourite Sweden trip was to Lapland (the largest town being Kiruna but Abisko and Björkliden also being great destinations) and this is definitely a must do! I went in winter where there is very thick snow, low temperatures and dog sledding to be done, as well as a wide range of other winter activities. Trips to Lapland are organised by tour companies, or you can get a flight or train and organise it yourself! The other main cities are Malmö and Göteborg which are great destinations for a weekend away. From Uppsala, there are smaller trips to be done and some of these are offered through the international department as day long bus-trips. Using the extensive bus system and doing your own day-trips to nearby towns can also be a good idea if you do a little research first! And of course there is Stockholm which was my most frequented place outside of Uppsala, and I am sure you will visit there a lot as the city is large and has a lot of museums and stores to keep a tourist busy!!

Uppsala gave me without a doubt the best experience of my life so far! I am so glad I chose this place which has a student culture to rival Otago and an international community that far surpasses our own! I would recommend Uppsala to everyone that's looking for an incredible and enriching exchange!!