

## Exchange Semester 2 2016 – Uppsala University, Sweden – N Ward BA/LLB

Going on exchange to Sweden was the best decision I have made since arriving at the University of Otago. Not only was it a fantastic and unique cultural experience, but I have made long-lasting friendships and visited places I had previously never heard of. Regardless of where you are thinking about going on exchange to, I can't emphasise enough how much you should apply and give it a go. Uppsala is not your standard exchange destination. Much like Dunedin, it is a student city, with much of the night-life geared towards (and exclusively limited to) students. This makes it a one of a kind experience.

Many international students live in accommodation such as Flogsta, which is a group of high-rise buildings on the outskirts of town. You have your own room and bathroom, and share a kitchen on your 'korridor' with about 25 other students, a mix of internationals and locals. This is where I stayed, and although by Swedish standards it is at the lower end of quality for housing, it is well-insulated, warm, and the centre of most of the student parties which makes it a sound choice. Accommodation is about \$170 per week, and this includes your power, water and (usually reliable) internet. Another recommendable option would be Rackarbergsgatan, as it is closer into the city and you share your corridor with fewer people. The cost of living in Uppsala is not so different from New Zealand, and both accommodation options have supermarkets close by. Alcohol is more expensive however, and must be bought specifically from 'Systembolaget', which is taxed and run by the government.

The distance of Flogsta was not an issue, as the first thing you will do in Sweden is buy a bike. You can expect to pay between 700-900SEK for your bike, and I recommend investing in a good lock. It is common in Flogsta for bikes to be stolen, so it pays to lock up the frame rather than a wheel. Don't let this put you off, Uppsala is a remarkably safe-feeling city and cycling around with friends was a highlight of the semester. The bike tracks in and around the city are well-maintained and easily accessible. Even in the depths of winter you can rely on the snow-ploughs to be out at all hours clearing them of snow, and many entertaining nights were had riding in and out to the student nations.

Student Nations are a standout in my memories of Uppsala. A cross between a sorority/fraternity and student club, they will usually consist of a big building that transforms itself from a café/library/student centre during the day, to a club at night. Fika, essentially going-out-for-coffee, is very common, and they also regularly have 'gasques' which are sit-down dinners. It pays to have a nice dress or suit for these, but the dress-code varies between nations. A central part of gasques is singing, and you will soon find yourself learning a few Swedish songs that are sung with much enthusiasm, before downing some schnapps and cider. I joined Sodermanlands-Nerikes Nation (known as 'Snerikes'). Once you have joined one nation, you are allowed access to all others, but they may charge a door charge for non-members on club nights. Therefore many international students join nations which have the best club nights (Snerikes on Tuesdays, Stockholm Nation on Thursdays or Varmlands on Fridays). Students can even pick up a bit of work at the nations, and I did this during my time. While essentially volunteering, it provided a great way to meet more Swedes, practice my Swedish and learn more about Swedish culture.

The University itself is of a high calibre, and many of its buildings are worth checking out in their own right. The Carolina library is particularly impressive, and the surrounding area has many parks and areas to spend time in while it is warm. I was studying law and politics, and my classes had a mix of internationals and Swedes. Swedish people as a general rule speak perfect English, and I never had

any trouble. I do recommend learning what you can however, people really seemed to appreciate the effort.

Depending on which semester you arrive in, you can expect a sun that never quite sets in July, or days that end remarkably quickly in January. Swedish summer is magical, so I recommend whichever semester you go in, to make the most of it before/after studies. I arrived at the start of August to take the Intensive Swedish Language course, and this was definitely worth it. In a short time I was able to get to know lots of other internationals, work out the city and some of its customs before the chaos of the semester kicked off. You are also only an hour away from Stockholm and Arlanda Airport, so it is easy to find cheap flights to other parts of Europe for a weekend away. I highly recommend a trip up to Abisko in Northern Lapland, as the Northern Lights are not to be missed.

Below are a few photos from my time there. I really can't stress enough how amazing your exchange in Uppsala will be!



Picnicking in the woods near Flogsta.



Performing with the Snerikes Choir at the Lucia Gasque prior to Christmas.



Fjords in Norway, hiking Trolltunga with friends.



Ice-skating in Uppsala.



At the Autumn Gasque/Ball (one of the more formal ones) at Snerikes Nation.

Swedish summer in Uppsala (below)

