

## Exchange Evaluation Report

**Host University:** Helsinki University

**Exchange Period:** Semester 2, 2016

**Degree:** Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Anthropology

An exchange is one of the best things you can do at uni, and I whole-heartedly recommend it. It's an amazing way to get to travel, meet new people, and live in the centre of a city you wouldn't usually get to, all with the support and framework of uni (and, thankfully, StudyLink). It's amazing how quickly you can adjust to a different life with such new and interesting things. You'll be so busy with exploring the city you choose to study in and visiting other countries that the time will go by very quickly!

### Courses

Instead of just having two semesters per year, each semester is divided into two teaching periods (so four teaching periods per year). You take one set of courses in the first teaching period, followed by exams in the middle of semester, then start another set of courses in the second teaching period and have another set of exams. I found that almost all of the courses I took in Finland could cross-credit back to my degree at Otago.

There is quite a range of courses, but even if a course you want to take isn't offered in English you can often take it by book exam. A book exam is where you choose a course book off a list of supplied texts and study it yourself. There is no teacher guidance and your only assessment is attending an exam. Because there was quite a range of courses the class sizes were quite small (up to about 60 students).

The Finnish language is very complex (it only shares similarities to Estonia and no other language). I did a beginners course for international students in learning Finnish. I really enjoyed it, but didn't learn that much in the four months I was there. The Finnish I learnt was good for going to the supermarket or ordering coffee, but almost everyone there has excellent English so it isn't necessary to learn Finnish.

I found the workload quite similar to the workload in Dunedin, but being a native English speaker certainly have me an advantage, as most of the other students spoke English fluently but as their second language. There were lots of exchange students. I'm not sure the exact number, but I would guess at over 500. Students came from almost everywhere, and there was such a range of the people you met.

## Student clubs and societies

Helsinki uni has so many different clubs you can join. The only one I actually joined was ESN- the Erasmus Student Network. It's for European exchange students but they allow all exchange students to join. They run pub crawls, scavenger hunts, and cheap group trips to Lapland, Russia, Stockholm and the Baltic States. I went on the ESN trip to Lapland and it was incredible! There are opportunities to go dog-sledding, cross-country skiing, swimming in the arctic ocean, seeing the Northern Lights, and going on a reindeer safari.

Even if you're not a member of a club you can often go to events they hold. The best type of party to go to is a traditional Finnish dinner called a sit-sit, run by different faculties and clubs. It's pretty much a three-course sit-down dinner with a glass of wine with each course (and they're usually BYO as well). The dinner is for giving speeches, standing up and telling funny stories, and lots of singing and toasts.

Another benefit of being a student is the unicafes. There are several unicafes over all the campuses and throughout town, where you get a full meal for only €2.60. The cost of food in Finland is about the same as in NZ, if not a bit more expensive (although dairy was way cheaper), so unikafe is a cheap way to eat.



The central square and cathedral. The central university building is on the left.

## Housing

There are two agencies that provide housing for student; HOAS and UniHome. They can place you in a studio apartment, a shared flat, or a shared room (in a studio apartment or a

flat). You should apply to these well before you leave (but I know people who did manage to find their own accommodation when they arrived).

I was in a shared flat in an apartment building for international students. This was such a great way to meet people from all over the world. I ended up making a lot more international friends than I did Finnish ones, although I'm sure if you really put in the effort it isn't very hard to meet local people. My apartment was newly renovated and high in quality. Because it was newly refurbished I had to buy all my own bedding and kitchen things, but my rent was only about NZ\$110 a week so that wasn't a problem. I had the cheapest rent of anyone I know, but it could get up to about NZ\$200 a week for a studio apartment.

All the buildings there have their own saunas, which is the Finns' favourite pastime, and an amazing way to warm up in winter. I was worried about the cold and the darkness in winter before I left, but I never found it too much of a problem. The housing standards there are so much higher than in Dunedin that you're always warm inside. It gets so cold that the sea freezes over (some years even enough that you can walk out to some of the islands on the ice!). When I left Finland in December there was only daylight between about 10am and 3pm.

Helsinki harbour and its islands



Helsinki as a city

Helsinki is a gorgeous city to live in. There are lots of parks throughout town, and you are always near to the sea and the islands in the harbour. Helsinki isn't a large city (about the same size as Wellington). There's plenty to do in town, but if you're going out at night I recommend the suburb Kallio- the bars are a lot cheaper there than in the city centre. Helsinki has trains that run into the centre of town, busses, trams, a ferry, and an underground line. It cost me around €80 for unlimited transport on all of them for the time I was there (you can load your transport card with money, or by day until a chosen date).



View from the train to uni

## Travel

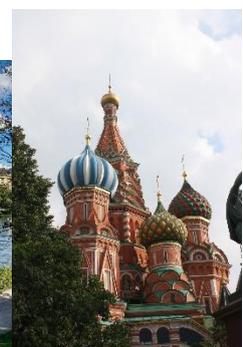
The great thing about studying in Europe is that it's so cheap and accessible for travel. Finland is in a part of the world that is less on the Mediterranean tourist trail, but has so many places you can visit from there. Flights to Stockholm are quite cheap, or you can catch an overnight ferry for about €40 return. You get a cabin between four and the boat has three clubs/bars on it. The Nordic countries are notoriously expensive, but the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) are much, much cheaper. You can catch a ferry from Helsinki to Tallinn, Estonia for €20 return, and sometimes can even get it way cheaper. Lots of people do this as a day trip even. St Petersburg is another popular place to visit from Helsinki. Visas to Russia are very difficult to get, but if you arrive in St Petersburg by boat you can stay for three days visa-free.



Lapland



Stockholm



St Petersburg