



My Exchange Evaluation

Basic Information

<i>Host University</i>	Haskoli Íslands (University of Iceland)
<i>Semester & Year of Exchange</i>	Semester 1, 2019
<i>Otago degree(s)</i>	LLB/BA
<i>Major(s)</i>	English

Academics/ course load

Which papers did you take whilst on exchange?

<i>Course title</i>	<i>Language of instruction</i>	<i>Otago equivalent</i>	<i>Otago credit value</i>
Icelandic: The Basics	English	100 level Language Paper	18
Scottish Women's Literature	English	300 level English Paper	18
American Dream Narratives	English	200 level English Paper	18
Iceland: Anthropological Past, Present and Future	English	100 level Anthropology Paper	18

Any comments about these papers?

I enjoyed every papers except American Dream Narratives. I would recommend Icelandic: The Basics, as it is a really thorough Icelandic language paper, which helped me immerse myself into Icelandic society during my time there. The Icelandic anthropology paper was excellent. The paper is an introductory anthropology paper, so it provides an introduction to the subject itself and provides within it an overview of the history of Iceland since the time of settlement, which was really interesting.

How did the academic experience/ workload/ style of teaching differ from Otago?

The workload is significantly lesser. I ended up talking an extra interest paper because of this, so my course was technically one paper over full-time. The teaching style is similar, just standard lecturing and power-points. None of my papers offered tutorials, but there was class discussion included in the lesson.

Accommodation

What accommodation did you stay in? What were the pros and cons of your accommodation?

I stayed in a guesthouse in the 105 area of Reykjavík. It was private accommodation, but university accommodation is also available. I emailed the landlord after finding his email on the university website, in the section on student housing (I tried to find it again for the purposes of this evaluation, but I couldn't find it. If you are at any point looking for accommodation in Reykjavík I would just recommend emailing the international office at HI and asking them for the names and emails of landlords that you can contact, they'll be happy to help you out).

I ended up having three female flatmates, but the last flatmate only arrived within the last month of my exchange, so essentially I had two flatmates. All three were working, with one of the girls working and studying at a different university. I didn't know who my flatmates were going to be before signing up to the room, so it was pretty lucky that we all ended up getting along so well! However, our living space was *tiny* - it was the top floor of a family home, and it was just four bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchenette.

I paid 80000 ISK a month for my own room. The Icelandic krona fluctuates incredibly, so sometimes by rent would equate to around 1100 NZD, and then drop to around 880 NZD per month. I know this seems like a lot of money by Dunedin standards, but my rent was actually the lowest amongst my group of friends. If you want a cheaper option, either live way out of Reykjavík city centre, or share a room.

My landlord was okay, He was pretty friendly, but he would sometimes come up to our area of the house and do these kind of surprise inspections. This was pretty shocking, because in NZ that's illegal. However, I also did not have a lease for my time there, and he did not allow me to have one, so the whole thing was pretty shady. However, I asked around and apparently (while illegal) the whole no lease thing is incredibly common and the landlord cannot kick you out even if you didn't sign a lease, and there are also legal retributions if you don't uphold your end of the deal. Honestly, get a lease, and if your landlord won't give you one, go to the international office and explain your situation. I really should have!

Money matters

Please detail your basic costs, e.g. accommodation, flights, visa, food, insurance

Iceland is expensive. Rent isn't cheap (see above), and my flights were about \$2000 there and back. Food was trickier to keep track of price-wise, but I think I spent about \$70 NZD per week on food. I didn't have to get a visa as I am an EU citizen, so I could stay in Iceland for six months without one. I didn't get insurance because I didn't have to as an EU citizen, but if you're not, you probably will need to get that sorted.

The biggest piece of money advice I would have would be get a job. Within the hospitality sector, hotel work, cleaning work, and factory work, knowledge of the Icelandic language is not required. I worked at a very cute Icelandic restaurant for 4 months, and the pay was excellent. The money I earn allowed me to live very, very comfortably (significantly more so than in Dunedin!), and meant that I learnt a lot of Icelandic. It was also a fantastic way to really immerse into Icelandic culture and society, as I was removed from my exchange student bubble. If you are an EU citizen, you will not need a work permit, but you will

need to get a kennitala. A kennitala is an Icelandic social security number, in essence, and you can get them from any bank for a fee. If you are not an EU citizen, you will need both a work permit and a kennitala. To my knowledge, getting a work permit can take a little bit of bureaucratic hoop-jumping, but it can be done, and they are given out frequently.

There are more jobs in Iceland than there are people to fill them, so I can say with a decent amount of assurance that getting a job would not be difficult, especially if you have hospitality experience. If you do not, getting a job at a factory of something similar would be pretty easy, and the pay is seriously good and would mean you would be living lush!

What means did you use to access your finances? What would you recommend? (Credit card, Cash passport, foreign bank account, etc.)

I just used my ANZ card, and my Icelandic Debit card. If you don't get a job in Iceland, don't bother opening a bank account. Iceland is a cashless society like NZ, so you will hardly ever need paper money.

Visas & Insurance

Did you have to apply for a visa? What was the process?

I am a dual citizen of the UK, which means, as an EU citizen, I did not have to apply for a visa for a semester exchange. I have heard that for students outside of the EU the visa process is pretty arduous, so I would recommend getting onto that a few months early. However, I cannot offer any advice as I did not have to go through the procedure.

Did your host university have a mandatory insurance?

Not to my knowledge.

Extra-curricular/Social Activities

What organised activities were available to students? What extra-curricular activities would you recommend to future exchange students?

There was karaoke on a Wednesday, which was a hoot. Alcohol is incredibly pricey, so my friends and I would generally get together to cook brunch at someone's place, or have drinks in the evening together with the alcohol we all cobbled together at the Duty-Free. The nightlife in the winter is pretty eh (it gets LOADS better in the summer, when there is no night), but my friends and I loved going to this queer bar called KiKi. There was a drag show on a few times a week, and they played a lot of 80s pop, so an all round good time.

Iceland is full of hot pools, public complexes of geothermal heating swimming pools where every man and their dog seem to convene. These are amazing, a godsend in the winter months. Commonly, groups of exchange students would hire cars on the weekends and go for trips Rond the island. When I wasn't working, I would join. Basically, someone would hire a car and everyone would split the hire cost and petrol, and go for two day trips. This was an incredibly cost efficient way to see the island, and a great way to make new friends.

Another activity my friends and I did was learn to knit! We would gather a couple of times a week to drink beer and cosy up with our yarn. It was actually really cool because everyone was into it.

What was the university/ city like?

The university was fine, it had this really cool brutalist main administration building and elaborate front garden thing. Reykjavík itself is a pretty small city, and its pretty quiet. I was lucky enough to see one of my favourite musicians play live, but even that was an

hour out of the city. The wonders of Iceland tend to lie outside the city boundaries, so go check them out!

Any recommendations for things to do, places to visit, places to eat etc.?

Hotpools! Seriously, the hot, unchlorinated water is life-changing. If you can, go in the middle of the day on a weekday- hardly anyone else will be there and you can soak by yourself. Food is expensive, but there is this place called noodle station that is cheaper and filling. If you wanna live a little lush, go to Þrír frakkar, that is the restaurant I worked at! They serve traditional Icelandic fare, and its a great place to go if you wants to try whale, horse, puffin, fermented shark and other such arctic delicacies.

Any tips for future students?

If you can, nab accommodation in the 101 area of Reykjavik - its pretty expensive but that is where the students tend to live, so you'll be more amongst it. IKEA is a really cheap place to eat - go there for dinner after a weekend trip when you have a car! Learn Icelandic, its hard but you'll benefit from it. BRING WARM CLOTHES - if you (like me), are born and raised in the comparative warmth of Oceania, the winter will be a shocker, -20 degree days were not uncommon and my clothes did not stand up against the outerwear of my Scandinavian counterparts.

Overall Experience

Please write one paragraph (or more) about your exchange experience. Please include some photos!

My semester in Iceland changed my life, I think. Sounds obscenely cheesy, I know, but it is true. The culture, history and mindset of the locals is so different from NZ, and the landscape is stark and stunning. Everyone you meet will be an artist, or an author, or play the bassoon in some experimental death metal collective. The winter is indescribable, and deeply effecting. It is beautiful, but it is dangerous, intimidating and powerful. It is unlike

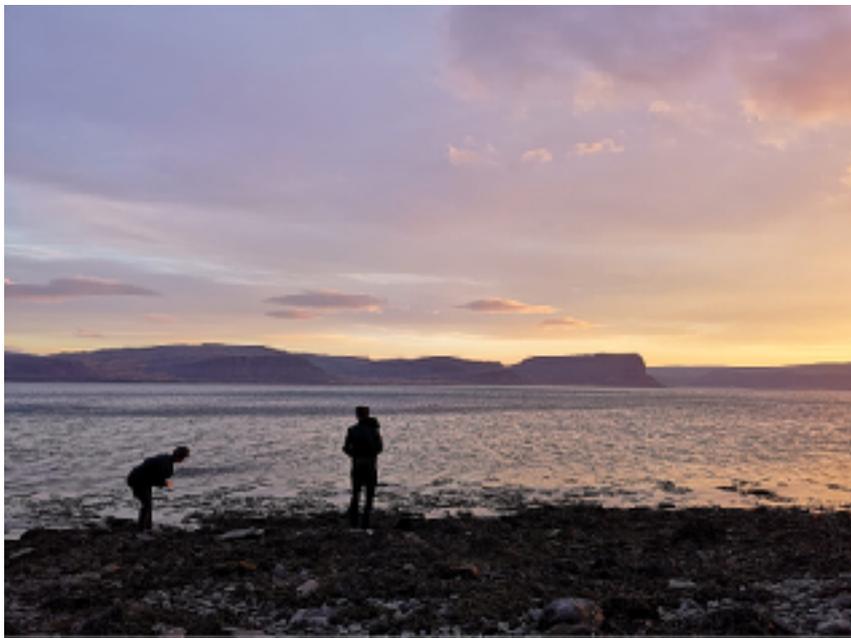
anything I have experienced before. I had a wonderful time in the North, met incredible people, and I'd go back in a heartbeat. Take fyrir, Ísland!

Anyway thats enough harping on - if you are considering Iceland as an exchange destination, please flick me an email with any questions that you have!

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Learning how to skip stones in Patreksfjörður - its all in the wrist!



Me pretending to be pensive in the Westfjörds after an afternoon of unsuccessful puffin (did see an arctic fox though) watching - and I knitted that hat!



One of the most magnificent sights I have ever seen - Dynjandi waterfall in the Westfjords.



My blessed (mostly Scandinavian) mates, knitting up a storm and about to watch a trashy Netflix flick.



Roadblocked! Rented Suzuki Swifts are not match for these babes. Had to bust out some horse herding skills (skills that I do not have, nor ever plan to acquire).



Goth Church moment? These gorgeous Lutheran churches are dotted all over the island, but this black one was special.