Introduction

In Fall 2018, I completed my exchange semester at Vienna School of Economics and Business in Austria. I’m currently in 4th year, concentrating in MIS and Marketing. My classes ran from October to December, but I went a month early and travelled all of September.

Preparation for Exchange

Vienna was a colder than Vancouver so I recommend bringing a heavy duty jacket. I also bought a pair of snow boots there since it started snowing in November. But don’t overpack because you’ll buy lots of clothes and souvenirs back and you don’t want to pay overweight luggage fee! My favourite part about Vienna weather was that it barely rained; I still brought an umbrella and it came in handy a few times.

The courses came out in June and my enrollment date was in early August. I had to wake up at 5am (2pm Vienna time) for my enrollment appointment. The courses filled up within seconds so you have to prioritize which courses you want to take the most. I was able to get three of out of four courses I want, but I found another 4th course to take eventually. I actually ended up enrolling in a 5th course when I was in Vienna because the course load was a lot lighter as compared to SFU’s courses. I usually take 3-4 courses at SFU.

I brought cash with me but I opened a bank account there and wire transferred the rest of the money I needed. I mostly used Austrian debit card and cash. Tipping isn’t mandatory there and people usually round up to the nearest euro. You can ask also ask for tap water at restaurants- it tastes just as good as Vancouver’s!

Arrival and Orientation

There is an EBN buddy program that you can sign up for. My buddy picked me up at the airport in a car and that was extremely helpful. He also took my friend and I out for schnitzel which is a popular dish there (basically, a giant fried pork or chicken cutlet). Some buddies will take the train with you to your dorm from the airport, but it is still nice regardless to have someone there to pick you up in a foreign city. My buddy also took me to register myself with the city the same day.

There is a three weeks orientation program which takes you all over Vienna and neighbouring city such as Graz and Melk. I would recommend it because my friends that was part of the program got to see many parts of Vienna that I did not, and a lot of people made friends during the orientation program in which they stayed friends with throughout the semester. I didn’t partake in the program because I wanted to travel to other countries in September when the weather was still nice and warm.
Accommodation and living

I stayed at a dorm called Kandlgasse and I loved it. It was situated in a nice area with grocery stores just a couple minute’s walk away. My roommate was girl from UBC that I met a few months before I left for Vienna (we requested to be roommates). We shared a kitchen and bathroom and each had our own bedroom. The place was clean, warm and spacious.

Academic details (lecture format, schedules, grading, etc.)

The class format was quite different than at SFU. Some classes were six hours a week for three weeks, and some were two to three hours a week for eight weeks. My classes had between 12-34 students, and they were all interactive. There were just lectures and no tutorials, however, the class size was small enough that you can ask questions whenever you want. Attendance was mandatory most of the time. I found that the professors teach in-depth concepts but the exams usually cover only the main concepts. All my exams were about one hour long or less. There were also group projects in most my classes. The grading scale ranks from one to five, one being the best.

Travelling

I travelled to a total of 12 countries and 21 cities during my exchange semester. Once you’re in Europe, it’s really easy to travel between EU countries. I recommend taking the train and buses to nearby cities since you won’t have to go two hours early like to the airport. You can book the buses and train at www.goeuro.com. Some of my favourite cities were London, Amsterdam, Cinque Terre, Santorini and Budapest. It’s hard to pick my most favourite city since my experience was so different in all of them. For example, London was the most exciting, constantly bustling with people. Cinque Terre was absolutely beautiful with colourful houses stacked on top of each other. Budapest was chill and relaxing since I went with another friend from SFU. Copenhagen was where I felt the most independent since it was my first and only solo trip in Europe. Each of the city gave me different memories and I hold them all close to my heart.
Reflection

Many times, I caught myself just walking through Vienna and thinking to myself, “Wow, I can’t believe I’m actually in Vienna.” I live with my family back in Vancouver and I’ve always been dependent on them. Going on exchange was my first time living alone, cooking for myself, and making my own decisions. It was truly a liberating experience. I made friends with people all over the world and I learned so much about other cultures. I ran into a lot of difficult situations constantly such as taking the wrong train to Slovakia to get my visa when I first arrived, almost getting pickpocketed in Barcelona, and not being able to find a cab to go to the airport to catch my flight back to Vancouver.

To expand on my last point, I ordered a cab through the airport website a couple days before, but it never came to pick me up. I called the company at to ask but they only spoke German. It was 4am so the street was silent and empty. I couldn’t believe I was still running into problems literally within the last few hours of my exchange journey. Miraculously, a cab pulled up to the next building and a woman stepped out of the door to take the cab. I ran up to her and asked if I could take the cab with her. She said yes and a I have never felt so grateful. I explained to her that I was on exchange from Canada and something always goes wrong. Instead of empathizing with me, she said “but that’s the beauty of it. You ran into all these problems but yet, you managed to overcome them all.” I sat in silent for a minute and really thought about what she said. She was right. Four months living way from home for the first time in a continent where English isn't the main language. Four months of figuring out the transportation in a new city every weekend. Four months of making new friends and pushing myself beyond my comfort zone. I did it. And I was coming home with so many stories to share and countless memories to cherish.

Going on exchange was amazing, crazy, tiring, fun, scary and everything in between, but it was by far the most rewarding chapter of my life.
Here are some photos from my trips!

September 2018. Santorini, Greece.

September 2018. Cinque Terre, Italy.

November 2018. Hallstatt, Austria.

December 2018. Vienna, Austria.
December 2018. Vienna School of Economics and Business.