Exchange Report

Details:
- The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands
- International Studies: September 2016 – January 2017

Preparation for Exchange:

Planning
Looking back on preparing for my exchange I have to admit it felt rather stressful. To avoid this: keep your emails in order, maybe categorize them in folders so you don’t find yourself searching through your inbox. I received an e-mail that requested me to visit the IND office immediately upon my arrival, however this was not the case. I should have taken a day, had a sleep and gone when I’d freshened up and felt rested (within the first week of arrival).

Packing
While attempting to pack I was fortunate that I was departing in the summer months and was able to fit quite a bit into a couple suitcases. Yes, I paid for one extra bag because this is half a year (or more). Additionally, I had my parents send over an extra box of winter clothing and shoes, do this early if you don’t want to pay extra fees to expedite your package and allow for a good month for it to arrive. Leave shampoo, conditioner, etc. at home to avoid extra weight, just buy it when you arrive or bring a very small amount in travel containers to get you through.

Transportation
The flight is long and uncomfortable; you just have to deal with it. Bring books, a good selection of music. Depending on your airline you can expect plenty of movies provided for you. Download games and puzzles onto your electronic devices to keep you occupied and TRY to catch a small snooze along the way to help with the time adjustment.

Financial
Holland works on a debit card system more or less. Credit cards may not be accepted in grocery stores so be sure to have cash on hand when you arrive! I would strongly advise opening up a Dutch bank account to avoid any fees or interest charged by your bank back home, not to mention you will feel like a local and it is easy to tap and go!

During Exchange:

Arrival & Orientation
One word: jet lag. Expect it, embrace it, cry a little. You’ve just spent hours on a plane and maybe trains as well. You are tired and homesick, let it out. But don’t cry forever, get up, take a
shower and keep moving. Explore your surroundings! I spent the first week in The Hague by myself before orientation started and realized I actually really enjoy the freedom of exploring and travelling alone! Orientation is a little long and gruelling as it takes up the entire week before classes begin but a load of information is thrown your way. Take notes, pay attention! They are doing it to give you the information you so desperately need to make your stay enjoyable and effortless.

**Accommodation & Living**
I rented privately proving to cost about the same as using DUWO (550 plus monthly utilities around 70 per month). If you don’t mind 3 other roommates and are looking for the full student experience I would recommend DUWO. The student hotel is probably the best option as you are near the school, staying with many other students and have everything at your fingertips. However, this is a costly option at around 700-900 Euro per month. The Hague shuts down around 6PM (18:00), so get your shopping done in the morning and don’t expect smaller shops to be open on Sunday and sometimes even Mondays.

**Academic Details**
Grades are measured through a scale from 1-10. A grade of 5.5 is a mere passing grade, while according to staff somewhere around a 6-7.5 is an average Dutch grade. In other words, the grading scale can be difficult, however attending lectures and completing the one essay assigned or exam for each course is very easy to complete with a passing grade. Lectures are normally 1.5 hours once a week, maybe twice, while some courses require an additional seminar session of 45 minutes much like tutorials. Due to the lack of class time, I would advise that you actually do the readings especially if you have an exam to write as your instructor does not have time to go over everything in this time frame.

**Country Information**
The Dutch can be mistaken as rude. However, this is what is referred to as ‘Dutch directness’. Learn to live with it, because they are not going to be as well-mannered or polite as our fellow Canadians. Expect to be bumped or squished in a tram or train, personal space can be limited at time and this goes for travelling all over Europe as the population density is far different than what we are used to at home. The weather is much like Vancouver and you can expect to see it all. I found that it tends to rain less and the sun actually shines more often! Much like Vancouver the weather can change in a matter of minutes however, especially with commonly strong winds blowing weather systems through.

**Social & Extra-Curricular Activities**
If you’re looking for some great food head to the Plein near the centrum and Binnenhof. There you will find a square that hosts a variety of cafes/restaurants/bars. Many students will attend Millers as it tends to host student specials. Learn to use the trains, visit surrounding cities such as
Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Gouda, Delft, or Leiden! Find some time to visit the beach, with a large boardwalk with shops, restaurants and bars. I would also recommend visiting the International Criminal Court as you are staying in the City of International Peace and Justice. You can sit in on an ongoing hearing and visit the exhibition set up in the visitor’s center.

Reflection After Exchange:

What I Learned/Challenges Faced
One of the largest challenges faced would have to be language. While some signs are listed in English, many are not making it difficult to get around at times. Learn the key words, this will improve your ability greatly. Don’t be afraid to ask people for directions, majority of the population speaks English and is willing to help! I have learnt most importantly to keep an open mind and to go with the flow of things. Travelling doesn’t run on a strict schedule and many forces may work against you, keeping a calm attitude and being able to assess your situation in this manner will provide better results. Thinking back there are not many things I wish I had known, although if you use a hairdryer or iron of any sort be careful! Be sure that what you are bringing from home matches up with the circuits in your flat before using, if you don’t you could fry your hairdryer or iron. The best advice I can give to other students would be to simply try and enjoy their time abroad and to spend their money on travelling rather than clothes or other material items, you are abroad for a short time and will be able to feed that shopping itch when you return home. Another piece of advice would be to learn to say yes to opportunities, even if they seem like something you would not normally do. Push your boundaries a little bit and step outside of your comfort zone, even more so than moving to a foreign country.
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