Preparation for Exchange

The hardest part about planning for exchange was the waiting. All I wanted to do was leave once I had been accepted into the program, but I couldn’t. First, in the summer my roommate and I applied for housing. We applied at the beginning of August (for Spring semester) but that was already late enough that we did not receive our first, second, or even third option. I recommend applying as soon as the applications open. With regards to packing, I have always been extremely last minute when leaving on a trip. I packed everything the night before. Not a good strategy for everyone but it worked out perfectly for me. Since I was there for three seasons (the end of fall, spring, and summer) I brought a lot of stuff. My friends also came to meet me at the end of the semester and we went travelling so they brought me some of my summer clothes.

In my semester prior to departure I went on Co-Op. I found this extremely helpful for my bank account. Because of this semester I was able to travel more than the average exchange student. If you have the opportunity, do Co-Op the semester before you leave.

For transportation I booked my flight early. To keep travel costs low monitor the flight prices and book when it is the lowest. Vienna, and many of the other European cities I visited, are primarily cash based with regards to restaurants and nightlife, and if a restaurant or bar does take cash there will probably be a purchase minimum. Having cash definitely makes life easier. I recommend opening an Austrian bank account so you don’t have to keep cash in your room. The Maestro debit card they give you is also more widely accepted than Visa or Mastercard.

Everyone says the cost of living in Vienna is super high, but I found it rather comparable to Vancouver. For this reason it most likely will not shock any SFU exchange student.

During Exchange

WU has an extremely welcoming buddy program. I recommend signing up for that. My buddy met my friend and I at the airport and took us to our room. He then took us to IKEA to help decorate our room. The buddies are extremely helpful when you first arrive always make time for you if you have questions.

The orientation program is also worth doing. It is a bit pricey for the activities that you do, but everyone does it and it is a great way to make friends. My favourite day was the day we went to a chocolate factory. All the other activities were things like museums, parliament, and city tours. Interesting stuff, but not as exciting as chocolate.

The student housing for all the universities in Vienna is run by one company, OEAD. I would recommend living in student housing even though you can likely find a cheaper flat if you look hard enough. Almost everyone lives in student housing though, and I would bet you would regret not living there too. The largest one is Gasgasse and everyone seems to live there. My friend and I applied late, so that one filled up. The student housing we were assigned to was not bad though. It was in the best location (close to Karlsplatz) and it was pretty affordable in comparison to the rest of them. It did have a shared kitchen though, and our food kept getting stolen. We wrote a note one time to the thief to stop and ended up with burnt bread in our fridge.... Pretty strange.
With regards to school it was relatively easy. I did well in all my classes and the professors were super understanding about missing class. It seems like they know that everyone is there to explore, so missing class for trips was not an issue for the most part. I also took a couple block classes. Block classes allow you to finish a course within 3 or 4 sessions (which are usually close together) and then complete an exam and be finished with it. Because of these classes I had only 26 days of class for the whole semester. They seem daunting since some of them are 8 hours long at a time, but they give you lots of breaks and usually it is interactive so you so not get bored.

The culture in Vienna is very laid back and relaxed. It seems like no one is ever in a rush or stressed over there. This is not something we are used to in North America, but it was an amazing change. I would love to live in Europe for this reason alone. The weather was very similar to Vancouver. Also, some days it would be absolutely pouring at my house, but as soon as you got to the next district (which was just a few blocks away) it would be sunny. Overall though the weather was nice. It does not rain as much as it does in Vancouver so you find yourself spending a lot of time outside. Although Austria is a landlocked country, there is a river that you can swim in and tan next to.

Here is a list of things you need to do so this report does not get too wordy:

- Go to the Danube river
- Go on the trampolines at the Danube river
- Rent Citybikes (they’re pretty much free)
  - Bike along the Danube
- Go to Schonbrunn
- See all the concerts you can
- Go wine tasting (there are tons of wineries just outside the city, go on a winery tour)
- Go to Vie I Pee Wednesdays, Prater Sauna, Travel Shack Tuesdays, Volksgarten, Saullenhaulle, Passage, Praterdome (they have a lot of good shows there) and any other club that has opened since I left
- Go to Prater amusement park (it is right behind school)
  - Ride the black mamba, the super tall swings, and play minigolf
- Go to an Opera show (standing Opera tickets are 3 euro)
- Go to Sofitel’s Das Loft
- Travel everywhere you can!

**Post Exchange Depression**

After exchange I travelled for the rest of summer with some friends, so I did not get home until recently. Since my return I have been missing my Viennese life and the friends I met over there. While it is nice to be home, I have realized that I enjoy the European lifestyle much more than the North American lifestyle. Going abroad definitely made me more independent, and although that came with challenges at the time it was worth it. My advice for outgoing students would be to stay as long as you can, because you are going to miss it when you are home.
Photos

My friends and I outside of Schloss Schönbrunn
Schloss Schönbrunn at night (taken on iPhone 4 excuse the poor quality)

Us on the Black Mamba at Prater (you won’t regret riding this)
The oldest of the tall swings in the world (super fun rode it like 5 times)
The first half of my birthday celebration outside of Rathaus during a wine festival

Us on the tall swings ride (I think it was called Prater Turn)
My friend and I on Citybikes outside of the WU campus