Exchange Report – Spring 2017 at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU)

Major: HR and MIS

Preparation for Exchange

After the confirmation of my exchange semester at WU in last summer, it was only until mid-October when I started receiving information on next steps. This is because WU’s semester goes from March to mid-July. It’s a long wait, but it’ll be worth it!

The first thing to complete before departure is apply for housing. WU gives you two options for housing, one being in pre-reserved residence halls or finding private housing elsewhere. If you choose the first option, I recommend filling out the online application form as soon as it opens. This is because housing offers are given on a first come first serve basis. The most popular residence halls are Gasgasse and Molkereistrasse, as most WU students reside there.

Academic Details

Course registration is different from SFU in the fact that everyone registers during one time slot. Due to this, it’s important to plan your schedule in advance (look at course outlines online) to ensure that you know what course you want to take. Class sizes are mostly kept to maximum of 35 students, so keep backup schedules in mind!

Packing/What to Bring

As for packing, it posed a difficulty because I had to pack for three seasons! Winter in Austria is a lot colder than Vancouver, so bring a couple of warm sweaters. However, I would recommend not to pack too much clothing as you’ll have lots of opportunities to shop in Vienna. Ensure to bring all important documentation for your visa application during the first week of your arrival in Vienna - the coordinator at WU will assist you with getting all this sorted.

Transportation

For transportation, I used multiple fare tracker apps (eg. Hopper) to ensure I could maintain low cost for the flight to Vienna. Please note that there are no direct flights to Vienna, so you would have a layover flight in between.

Financial Details

Vienna is a cash-based city, so ensure to be carry some wherever you go. I also opened a bank account through Erste Bank on campus and you get a Maestro debit – this extremely helpful as for wire transfers and if I didn’t want to always carry too much cash around. I found the cost of living to be relatively similar to Vancouver. I also recommend to apply to any scholarships or bursaries aimed for students going on exchange for additional financial support.
During Exchange

Arrival and Orientation

I highly recommend signing up for the EBN buddy and orientation program! My EBN buddy was extremely helpful in answer all the questions I had pre-departure and she also picked me up from the airport when I arrived. She also showed me around campus and gave me general information about the city that I wouldn’t have known through research. EBN also hosts pre-organized trips to nearby cities for you to sign up and attend as well.

WU’s exchange program has approximately 500 students per semester, so the orientation was a great way to meet fellow peers from around the world. In three weeks, your orientation group takes you to many sights and explore Vienna together. I met the most amazing group of people - most of us went on to do further travelling and activities together till the end of the semester!

Accommodation and Living

The dorm that I lived in was Sechshauser Strasse – one of the pre-reserved dorms. This was not one of the popular choices, but I enjoyed staying there because it was a 15 minute walk from a palace! There are also lots of grocery stores within a five minute distance, so this was extremely convenient. It took me around 30 minutes to get to WU on the metro, which is considered long in Vienna but normal for me in Vancouver.

The student semester metro pass was what I mainly used for transportation around Vienna. It’s basically like a U-Pass and you have access to practically all buses/trams/metro. Google Maps also isn’t helpful in Vienna, so download Quandoo to get more accurate directions.

Academic Format

Courses taught at WU had a similar style to lectures and seminars at SFU. However, there are classes that take place over the course of a month, with multiples sessions in a week. Most of the students in the classes were usually also on the exchange program, as there are only a limited number of courses that taught in English. The grading system at WU on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being equivalent to an A at SFU. I felt that courses were comparatively easier to SFU, and presentation heavy.

Country Information

Austria is in central Europe, with Vienna being the capital city – the main spoken language is German. The rich culture of Vienna is really shown through everyday life during my exchange. No matter what and when, there’s always something happening in the city in various forms of art. One of my most memorable moments was listening to a classical musical concert in front of a summer residence of the imperial family!
When it comes to temperature the winter was relatively dry and cold, averaging around negative temperatures. Spring temperature was mild with moderate precipitation till May. Summer is when the weather becomes more hot and humid, the temperature averaging in low 30s.

Social and Cultural Activities

There’s always something for everyone when you are in Vienna, but here is a list of my recommendations of must dos!

- Go to Prater Park and go on the swing ride (you get an awesome aerial view)
- Eat Schintzel at Schnitzelwirt – the best and cheapest in town!
- Have an outdoor picnic in Burggarten or Stadtpark
- Attend an opera/a ball
- Hit up LEO’s Wurstelstand and get a Big Mama
- Grab a few friends to hang out along the Danube River
- Look up what festivals are happening in the city and attend one of them!
  - Facebook and ViennaWurstelstand is a handy tool

Reflections After Exchange

Learnings and Challenges

Exchange has definitely taught me lots on what it’s like to be living independently and understanding how you react to unfamiliar reactions. A major challenge for me initially was the language barrier I had with locals when trying to figuring out the most simple tasks I could usually do back in Vancouver! I have also been so culturally enriched during my time in Vienna – it was one thing to read about history online, but seeing everything in person was a whole different experience.

What I Wish I Knew Before I left

- Learn more about how healthcare works in your country – I had a bit of trouble finding help when I need it
- Search and join Facebook groups - I found a fellow dormmate through this and this is a great way to ease yourself in living in a new country
- On Packing: If you use any branded products often, make sure to bring them – stores abroad is nothing like back at home.

Advice/Tips

- Try all of the typical dishes of countries you visit – it might not be easy on the waistline, but I’m sure you won’t regret it
- Do something new or explore a different part of the city each week
- Things won’t go as planned sometimes – the best memories are left unimagined!
Photos

My lovely orientation group!

Getting my Sunday brunch on at Erich and Café Telegraph
Views up at Hallstatt on an EBN pre-organized trip

Getting ready to listen to the Philharmonic Orchestra at the Schonbrunn Palace
Attending the very first TedXVienna Adventure event

All smiles for my last course of the semester with a wonderful project group