SFU – Study Abroad (International Exchange)  
University of Economics, Prague (VSE) – Czech Republic

INTRODUCTION
I studied abroad at the University of Economics, Prague in the Czech Republic in Fall 2013. I am a Business student, concentrating in Marketing and International Business.

PREPARATION FOR EXCHANGE
I would recommend getting started on your visa application as soon as possible. I waited until I received the acceptance documents from VSE before getting started; however, this probably made the process much more stressful. Look online for what is required (from the Czech Embassy in Canada) – you will need to get a police statement, bank statements, etc. These will need to be translated and some of them need to be notarized. Also, make sure to get the “student/studying abroad” version of the police statement from the RCMP as it is shorter and costs less. All of these things can be done in advance, and since the process is very lengthy (you have to send everything to Ottawa, which then is sent to the Czech Republic), it will save you stress if you can send your application to Ottawa sooner.

I found flights (round trip) for a little under $900. Most flights are more expensive, but I kept checking websites everyday for a couple of weeks and came across these cheap flights with British Airways.

ARRIVAL AND ORIENTATION

I think that the best thing VSE does for an exchange student is partnering you with a Czech “buddy”. Some of them are great and some of them are bad, but most are very helpful. They will pick you up from the airport, show you around the city on your first few days, and help you with getting your first groceries and similar things. My buddy became one of my best friends during my exchange, as did the buddies for many other students as well.
There is also an orientation week at the beginning, where the school provides lectures and tours. This isn’t extremely helpful, but I would still recommend going.

I went to the “ice-breaking weekend”, and although it is a little lame, it is a great way to meet people. You get put in teams with other students and compete in activities, and there are parties on both nights. It was nice because I knew most of the people in all my classes after this.

**ACCOMODATION**
Be prepared – the dorms are not very nice! However, I looked at pictures online before I left and knew what to expect. Even though you will make fun of the dorms (Jarov) for the whole semester, you will learn to love them after just one week because you will be surrounded by your friends the whole time. It as also VERY inexpensive – the whole semester only cost around $550.

There are two buildings for exchange students – Jarov F and Jarov D. Jarov F is where I stayed – it is not as nice, but I am glad I was put in that building because there are more exchange students from around the world, and I made great friends with many Europeans (great for future travel)! Jarov D is a little nicer, and in my semester this building housed mostly North American exchange students. However, there are six people per flat in this building who all share a bathroom (compared to four in Jarov F).

The dorms are approximately 15 minutes to the school by tram, and 20 minutes to the city center.

I know some people who lived off campus, closer to the city center and in nicer accommodation, but they did not have as many friends and it was a much different experience in Prague for them. I am not sure how much rent is, but it is definitely much more than living in the dorms.

Overall, it depends on your personality and you have to make the choice that is best for you.

**ACADEMIC DETAILS**
One problem at VSE is that many of the courses are only 3 ECTS (1.5 credits at SFU), so if you can find classes that you like that are 6 or 7 credits, this might be better. However, classes that are 3 ECTS only have 1.5 hours of class time a week, so they do require less work.

There is much less preparation for classes required at VSE (many courses do not even require a textbook), and the exams are a lot easier. The professors are very accommodating, so you do not need to stress about school very much.
The main difference between SFU and VSE that I found was that at VSE, you are required to participate much more. Classes are a lot smaller, so lectures function more as tutorials. I am shy, so this made me a little nervous at first, but it is great to experience a new kind of learning environment!

COUNTRY INFORMATION
The weather in Prague is very similar to Vancouver. It only snowed once or twice while I was there in December, but I think this might be a little less than normal.

The Buddy System organizes a few trips throughout the semester. I went to on the Kutna Hora day trip (one hour from Prague), but they also have trips to Krakow, Budapest, and Moravia, as well as a skydiving event.

Note: cash is much more acceptable in the Czech Republic than debit or credit cards. I took out money from the ATM for a cost of $3 each time, but check with your bank to see if you can set up a plan to withdraw money at no cost.
CZECH CULTURE
It is very inexpensive to eat out in Prague, so I ate out for lunch and dinner almost everyday. It costs around $10 for a meal and a beer at a good restaurant, and $15 at a very nice place. The school cafeteria is very cheap, but the food is awful. You can grab a quick lunch at places near the school or in the city for around $5 instead.

Everything else is also quite inexpensive in Prague (bus pass, shopping, sports events, etc.) So if you want to travel a lot on weekends, you will save a lot of money by choosing the Czech Republic for your exchange.

If you like beer – Prague is the place for you! The Czechs have a huge beer culture, and are very proud of their beer. There are pubs everywhere, so visit different ones. In addition, one beer is just $2 on average!

The Czechs are not very friendly, and you will definitely see a huge difference in customer service compared to Canada. However, you have to respect that this is just their culture, and don’t be like the Americans who complain that everything is better in the states!

REFLECTION
My exchange in Prague was probably one of the best experiences of my life. Prague is a beautiful old city located in the heart of Europe, has a great nightlife, and is very inexpensive.

Many older and less educated Czech people do not speak English, so at first it was a little bit of a struggle to do daily things that are so easy at home. However, you will have your new friends to support you, who are all having the same experience.
The best thing about going on exchange – no matter what destination you choose – is that you will build an international network and make friends with like-minded people from around the world. My advice would be to not make friends with only North Americans – this is your chance to learn about new cultures and create friendships with people from around the globe!