I studied at the University of Prague, Czech Republic from September – December 2018. I am studying business with a concentration of marketing.

**PREPARATION FOR EXCHANGE**

**Visa**

I would recommend starting to apply for the visa as soon as you have been accepted and confirmed accommodation and dates. I applied for the Youth Mobility Visa. For this I needed to fill out an application, sign some forms, provide proof of financial resources (I got a signed letter from my bank), and got two Czech passport sized photos (I got this done at London Drugs). I also had to send in my passport with the application and had to get all documents translated into Czech. It took about a month for them to send me my visa back, which was less than the time that they said to expect. However, it is good to send it in as soon as possible to ensure that it will not be a rush at the end and that you get it in time to go.

**Packing**

For packing, I brought a suitcase, travelling backpack, and a small foldup backpack for school. Going in the fall you need to be prepared for all kinds of weather as it will likely be very hot at the beginning of the semester and can be very cold, and sometimes snowy, at the end of the semester. Bringing things that you can layer will help you pack lighter. When packing I would also recommend leaving some space as you will most likely be bringing more back with you than you came with. If you forget anything or don’t want to bring everything you will most likely be able to buy it there. However, I would recommend bringing any medicine (cold, pain killers) as the brands are different there and I wasn’t sure exactly where to get them.

**Travel and Finances**

I flew in and out of London as I did some travelling before and after my exchange. It cost about $600 to fly to London and about $800 to fly back. For finances, most places do take credit card, but you will need to have the Czech currency, Czech Korunas as some places, including restaurants do not take card. There are plenty of banks where you can take out cash in Prague but
they do charge a small fee so I would always take out larger amounts. It may also be helpful to bring other currencies, such as euros, if you are planning to travel.

**DURING EXCHANGE**

**Arrival and Orientation**

I would recommend signing up for the buddy system that is provided. Most buddies will pick you up from the airport and show you around the city on your first few days. The school also provides an orientation week. The orientation week was mostly lectures (a culture shock lecture, a basic Czech lesson, and academic information) and it also included a scavenger hunt. The buddy system also provided fun activities to explore the city (a brewery tour and a walk to a viewpoint of the city).

**Accommodation and Living**

I chose not to live in the dorms and instead found a long-term Air BnB. There were quite a few good options to choose from if you would prefer something bigger than the dorms. I was also living about 15 minutes away by bus so getting to school was quite easy. The cost was about $1,500 for 4 months with a roommate. If you are looking for accommodation off campus, most places that I saw do not have an oven and only have a small sized fridge.

There are many big grocery stores in Prague – Tesco, Billa, and Albert are the main ones. People at grocery stores typically don’t speak English and it is very different than grocery shopping in Vancouver. People were a lot more unfriendly and it was difficult to communicate. However, it is a lot cheaper to shop in Prague than it is in Vancouver.

**Academic Information**

Most classes are 1.5 hours and not too large. I took 5 courses which was credit-wise the equivalent of 3 courses at SFU. Only one of my classes required a textbook and most exams were only multiple choice. If you plan to travel lots I would consider the days the classes are on when trying to decide what to take. I was able to get all of my classes on just two days which gave me time for longer trips. This was great for travelling but, as exchange students are able to take their exams during the last week of classes, I had all of my exams in 2 days. This was
manageable though as the exams were mostly multiple choice and only based on material
covered in lecture. Also, most classes have a rule that if you get between 50-59% as a final grade
in the class then you can retake the final exam. Also, most classes were mostly based on exams,
some had a presentation and/or case studies, and one class had attendance as a mark. I took the
Basic Czech class for Foreigners which was quite helpful for learning some Czech phrases which
are useful when getting around the city.

Country Information

The Czech Republic was a great place to live. It has a very central location in Europe which
makes it easy to travel around, especially by train. Prague is a great city but there are also many
cool cities around the country that would be cool to visit. A few companies have student
discounts for bussing around the country, so it can be really cheap. I went to Cesky Krumlov
which is a small city south of Prague.

The weather was somewhat similar to Vancouver but with much less rain. It was quite warm at
the end of August and in September but got fairly cold in October. It also snowed a few times in
December.

People are not as friendly in the Czech Republic which can be difficult to get used to at first. A
lot of older people do not speak any English, so it is good to try to pick up a few Czech phrases.

REFLECTION AFTER EXCHANGE

I bought a sim card from Vodafone which you can use in most countries in Europe, so it was
very helpful for travelling. If you buy a sim card, make sure your phone is unlocked before you
leave. The school does give out one-month Vodafone sim cards with 3GB of data during the
orientation week. I had bought a sim card before knowing that they would be provided but my
plan had 10GB of data and 1000 minutes to call Canada which was very useful for calling home.
If you don’t have a plan or much data, downloading languages on google translate and maps on
google maps will be very useful.

Also, before you get a transit card you will need to buy individual passes for the metro, trams,
and busses. Not all tram/bus stops have places where you can buy tickets and if they do they may
only accept coins. Most major metro stops will take cards too, but not all will.
Overall, Prague is a great city to explore and if you go in the fall the Christmas markets are very fun to explore!

Exchange is a great opportunity to explore Prague, the Czech Republic, and Europe. I learned a lot about the different cultures and languages around Europe. It’s also a great experience to put yourself out there and challenge yourself. It can be challenging and scary when first arriving, but it really helps to put yourself out there and experience the new culture. It can also sometimes be tiring to travel a lot and constantly go out but it is definitely worth it and will make for an extremely memorable exchange experience. I had the best time in Prague and loved exploring the city.

PHOTOS