Partner university: Aarhus Summer University

Country: Denmark

Major/faculty: Bachelor's Degree Programme in Media Studies

Dates/term(s) of exchange: July 24 - August 18

### Pre-Departure

**Packing, what to bring**

My exchange was a part-time summer exchange and I only stayed 5 weeks total, so I suggest packing light. I would advise to bring more spring/autumn clothes than summer clothes. Summer weather in Aarhus can be very bipolar (raining heavily in the morning followed by clear skies in the afternoon), meaning there probably won't be as many opportunities to wear a t-shirt and shorts. An umbrella is essential to bring.

**Travel and transportation**

Instead of flying to the Aarhus airport, it's cheaper to fly to Copenhagen first, then take the train or Flixbus to Aarhus. Either option takes around 4 hours. Within Aarhus, the fastest way to get around is probably by bike. You can rent a bike for a month or buy one second hand, and most people I asked vouched for that option. The city tram is still being constructed and bus fare is slightly more expensive than Vancouver. I walked most of the time except for taking the bus to school.

**Financial details**

Denmark is typically accepting of credit cards, and I've seen them used more than cash. Except for phone plans, expect to pay more for everyday things like groceries and clothes. Eating out is especially more expensive than Vancouver, so I advise packing your own lunch if need be. Even though alcohol is not state-regulated, it can be costly. This includes going
out drinking. Fruit and some kinds of produce are priced by the unit, not the kilogram. Apples, some berries, and pears are mostly from Denmark. Other fruits are imported. Denmark is a major exporter of pork, therefore pork is the cheapest meat to buy with chicken coming in second. There is a fish and seafood market in Aarhus Ø that has a vast variety of fresh fish and shellfish.

Planning protips

In the planning process, I would have found it useful to have a grasp on the scale of the city, as in how far my residence was from the city centre, university buildings, bus stops, etc. If it's a month-long part-time exchange, I think it would be beneficial to be somewhere more central, as it would be easier to make the most of the city sights. It's fortunate that Danes speak fluent English, so you can survive by just knowing a few basic sentences in Danish.

Academic details (researching courses)

Aarhus University has a webpage just for the summer university courses, and I was able to see the course outlines here. Courses can start and end at different weeks, depending if they’re categorized as Term 1 (usually start in early July and end late July) or Term 2 (usually start in late July and end mid-late August). It is possible to have 1 main choice and 1 backup choice per term, and you may choose either term or both to take classes in. Courses last a month long and are categorized as part-time, but I am uncertain if taking courses in both terms counts as full-time.

Arrival and orientation

It is recommended to fly to Copenhagen, then take the train or Flixbus to Aarhus. The journey is around 3.5hrs on train and 4hrs on Flixbus. If you come between the Aarhus University International Office’s opening hours (10am-2pm), you are able to pick up your housing materials straight from there. Otherwise, you will need to contact another student to pick up your materials for you and let the office staff know. I took the latter option, and because of this possibility, I recommend joining the AU Summer University Facebook Group
as soon as you get a welcome preparation email with that information. They will send emails on housing information, starting dates, social activities, etc periodically, and as each email is rich in information, I advise you read them thoroughly. I signed up for one of the campus tours the school offered. They were all on Sunday, so I picked the Sunday closest to the day I moved in. The campus tour included lunch and a showing of the main buildings around the University area. There wasn’t a formal residence orientation, and most of the things I learned about the residence (common areas, laundry, etc.) were from asking other students that lived in the building longer than I have. Most of the important instructions regarding facilities, such as using the washing machine, were all in Danish. I asked someone else how to set the washing machine to English.

Accommodation and living

Housing is very difficult to find in Aarhus, and it’s fortunate that exchange students are guaranteed housing by the school. Around 2 months before the exchange begins, you may choose the type of accommodation you want. The housing section of their website has
descriptions on the types of student housing and the different lease periods. The rent payment is paid once in full, and if your lease period ends before your course ends, it's up to you to find a place to stay for the remaining time. I highly recommend looking up the locations of the different student houses before deciding what you want because of transportation being not that convenient. My apartment was on Aarhus Ø, which is a relatively new artificial island built near the fishing boats. Public transportation didn't frequently reach and it was a 10min walk just to leave the island area.

My room in the student apartment Grundfos Kollegiet

The apartment key and info book can be picked up at the International Office. My residence was a relatively new apartment shared with one roommate of the same gender.
The rent includes utilities, WiFi (there is already a router), brand new bedding and kitchen tools.

**Academic details (lecture format, schedules, grading, etc.)**

Lectures happened for the first week inside a classroom setting. There was more independent work in the second week, and the third week was spent mostly on a class-wide game jam. The fourth week included preparing for our biggest exam, a presentation pitch at the Dokk1 Public Library. Work we did included conceptualizing a Virtual Reality game that uses Virtual Reality in an innovative way, writing academic blog posts, writing reflection blog posts, making an academic poster about our game concept, analyzing our game using game theory (which had to be applied in every writing assignment we had), and creating a concept video for our game.

We went on a field trip to Limitless VR to get first-hand experience with Virtual Reality gaming.

We had two professors running the course. One was in charge of the first two weeks, and the other taught the last two weeks. Documents related to grading criteria and assignment specs were not all kept in one place and were sent at irregular time intervals, worded unclearly, or both. In addition, everything is group work. There was a sense of “divide between Danes and foreigners” in the classroom. Though the language of instruction was English, the professors would sometimes speak Danish to the Danish students in the
presence of international students. I found this to be exclusive at times but my teammates would usually explain it in English later.

Grading for my course was done with the Danish 7-point grading scale. Distribution of grading was not clear since there was only one grade at the end and no grade for separate tasks in the class (i.e. Game concept, blog posts). This meant we couldn’t see which assignments had the greatest weight on our grade because there was no such criteria introduced. We would receive feedback for our exam blogs online.

Our final presentations were held at the Dokk1 Public Library

Country information (culture, weather, places to visit, etc.)

Danish culture is noticeably less competitive, and playing hard is just as important as working hard. Many people practice sustainability. Examples include growing fruits in their yard, vegetarianism, and shopping at second-hand stores. The Danish classmates would ask
on our class Facebook group if anyone wants to go to a pub on Friday night. They were welcoming and willing to initiate social events to create a sense of bonding among classmates.

Upon moving in, I got a city pamphlet that advertised free walking tours throughout the city. Restaurants, entertainment, etc. were also advertised. There are also double decker city busses that drive to the major landmarks. Some popular places to visit include the Dokk1 Public Library, the ARoS contemporary art museum, and Den Gamle By museum. Inside the Dokk1 library, there is a bell that tolls anytime there is a birth in a nearby hospital. A trendy part of town is Latinekvartet (Latin Quarter), where small shops, quirky cafés, and bars line the cobblestone streets.

I heard of classmates who spent the first and second weekends going to different cities and islands in the Jylland region. My roommate and I went to Skagen, the northern-most city in Denmark. It was a small city with several beaches and a well-known lighthouse by Grenen. Some Skagen attractions include a maritime museum, a teddy bear museum, and several artisan glassware shops. Skagen is approximately 4 hours away by train, and as most sights can be seen in one day, it is feasible to take an early train and make it a day trip.

Weather was very bipolar this year. I hear it usually is warmer and more stable than this. If it rains torrentially in the morning, it could be practically sunny by noon, and the pattern repeats throughout the day. Temperature was around 17-22 degrees Celsius. It is advised to have an umbrella at all times.
Social and extra-curricular activities

It is possible to sign up for certain activities such as canoeing trips, Viking tours, city walks, etc. but I didn’t do any of those. The only one I did was MoCap, a game jam held in IdeasLab that a facilitator there introduced to us during our in-class game jam. We spent Friday and Saturday designing a game concept and a semi-functional prototype for the Smartsuit Pro by Rokoko. There were mentors and an afterparty in the design studio.

Old Town of Skagen, Denmark

My teammate’s computer screen while calibrating the Smartsuit Pro at the MoCap design jam
As for going out to drink, pubs are almost everywhere in the downtown area. Popular beers include Carlsberg and Tuborg. Alcohol is not state-regulated, so it is possible to buy alcoholic drinks in grocery and convenience stores before 10pm. Some pubs don't serve food. A popular food to eat between drinks would be kebab, shawarma, or falafel.

**Knowledge learned, challenges faced**

The greatest challenges were probably the balance between academic workload and having time to see the city. I did not know of the nature of this course before I signed up for it, and it turned out to be more intensive than I thought. There is also a lot of teamwork, and as almost everyone was of a different educational background and mindset, and aside from the occasional language barrier, it could be difficult to get everyone on the same page regarding the direction of the project. Additionally, sometimes there is a lack of clear criteria for projects which can be stressful and confusing. Learning to adapt to that frequently means communicating with other teams on their interpretation of the criteria.

Apart from the occasional I learned to adapt to teamwork dynamics in a more international context and how to deliver presentations that are more easily understood by non-native English speakers. I've learned some basic Danish words too.

**Advice/tips for other students**

- Try to get placed in an international housing by the city center or near the building with your classes. If you can’t, rent a cheap bike.
- Be prepared to work hard if you take my class. Some groups have pulled all-nighters.
- Take advantage of a social program or two that falls on a weekend.
A small map of the area around school