Preparation for Exchange:

When preparing for my exchange, I discovered that a mutual friend had done the same program the year before. I found this very useful as I was able to ask specific questions and get candid responses from someone who had experienced things first-hand.

After visiting Beedie study abroad, I was led to a website to research courses and could see which ones transferred over to SFU. It was also helpful to ask this mutual friend what courses he had taken and what to expect. Fortunately, he had taken one of the courses I had chosen and could give me some tips.

In terms of packing, I mainly just brought clothes and a few personal items. As it is only a 6-week program and it is during the summer, there was no need to pack all of my clothes. Copenhagen has mild summers, so I brought a mix of lights summer clothes as well as long pants and sweaters. While Copenhagen is an expensive city, there are a couple stores like “Flying Tiger Copenhagen” where you can get cheap school supplies, so I avoided adding extra weight and did not bring many school supplies.

There are many modes of transportation in Copenhagen. I opted for biking everywhere. You can metro, bus or train but it can get pricey. Luckily Copenhagen is a very bike friendly city and almost everyone bikes everywhere. They have specific bike lanes and traffic lights and bikes are catered to more than cars. It is a part of the experience of living in Copenhagen. I was lucky to get one for free from my family but you can rent one for a month from a bike rental place called “swapfiets” for $30.

In terms of paying for things, Copenhagen rarely uses cash. When we were doing a walking tour with volunteers from the school one day, they brought up that even the homeless don’t ask for cash and instead hold out numbers that you transfer money to for them. I used my credit card for everything. However, some older or smaller stores may not take credit and take Danish debit or cash only. These are stores such as small thrift stores or small locally owned stores.

During the exchange:

I had been travelling with my parents before I arrived in Copenhagen and stayed with my uncle and aunt once I was in Copenhagen. However, they do have an arrival day in the airport where
they greet you and give you a sim card, your housing key, information, your social package bracelet and help you find your way to your residence.

As mentioned before, I stayed with family, but they have several accommodations that are all similar in price and vary in distances from the school. They are all within 20 mins of walking from each other and the school. The layout is different for every building. Some buildings have private rooms and shared kitchens and bathrooms. Others have shared or single rooms with kitchens and bathrooms in the rooms.

For the school aspect, the lectures were 2.5 hours long and 2-3 days a week. Classes were typically Monday-Thursday but there were some weeks where there were classes on Friday to make up for how short the program was. The grading is based off of a 100% final exam or final paper/project. There are also optional assignments and quizzes throughout the term to help with understanding. The grading is different than SFU and instead of being letter grades and percentages it is on a 12-point scale. It ranges from -2 to 12. -2 and 0 are considered failing grades and a +2 would be considered the first number to be a pass. The credit system is also different than SFU. The courses are worth 7.5 credits there.

Copenhagen is a beautiful and very livable city. The weather is similar to Vancouver’s and it is also on the ocean. Temperatures are mild and there is a mix of rainy days and sunny days in the summer. Denmark prides themselves in their sustainability, design, biking and Viking culture. I would recommend visiting the Danish Architecture Centre, the Design Museum, the castles and towers in the city and the Glyptotek. In terms of places outside of Copenhagen, I would recommend taking the train up to Helsingor and visiting the Hamlet Castle, the Louisiana museum of modern art just outside of Helsingor and the Viking museum in Roskilde.

There are many cool and exciting things to do in your spare time in Copenhagen. Something I did often was bike down to the canal at Islands Brygge to swim. It is a very popular spot in the summer and there is often live music or events going on. There are also many cool cafés and pubs to visit to study or to catch a bite to eat or drink with friends. One of my favourite places to visit was Reffen. Reffen is a big food truck market across the canal, near Christiania. They offer different types of food from all over the world as well as beer and drinks. Once you grab your food, you can sit on reclining chairs by the canal and soak up the sun and fresh air. It is a great location to hit up for sunset as it faces the west.

Reflections after exchange:

Some small challenges and things I learned involved the currency, tipping, basic things you learn when travelling on your own for the first time and getting used to the culture. Fortunately, it was an easy conversion to go from Danish currency to Canadian. At the time I was there, all I had to do was divide the Danish currency by 5 to get the Canadian equivalent. It took a little while to get used to seeing prices so much higher than what they would be in Canadian. For instance, a
sandwich would cost 68DKK in Copenhagen but in reality, its $13.6 Canadian. Another thing that was weird to get used to was the fact that no one really tips in Denmark. It is not expected, nor is it required. They find it weird if you tip there. Next was the language barrier. Luckily, English is spoken almost everywhere in Copenhagen, so that was not a big problem for me. However, when travelling in other countries or in smaller towns in Denmark, sometimes the language barrier made it hard to make my way around and get things done. It is also easy to get scammed or tricked when you cannot communicate with people you are talking to. In the Czech Republic, trying to find a phone plan was really hard and ended up costing me a lot of unnecessary money. Lastly, there are obviously differences in culture wherever you go and this is something I had to take into account and observe and learn so I knew how to interact with the locals there.

There are a couple things I wish I knew before. I was not sure how hard the schooling would be so I put a lot of work into my studies. What I came to learn though was that they are not there to fail you. And, most of the professors there are also just there for the summer and want to enjoy their time there as well. While the work you put in does reflect your grade, there is no need to slave in the books and stress yourself out. It is important to balance school with exploring the city and enjoying yourself. After a couple weeks and I came to realize this and made sure I balanced it better. Do not stress too hard or get worked about the courses. If you put a little bit of work in daily and study for the final exam, you will be more than okay. It costs a lot of money to get there so it is important to make the most of your experience.

Lastly, some advice and tips I would give, would be to be open minded and adaptable as much as you can. While it can be daunting and a little scary to be so far from home, being open minded makes the experience a lot less stressful and more enjoyable. When things go not as planned and they will sometimes, don’t dwell on it too much. I had the motto of “it’s out of my control” and it helped me move forward in a lot of situations. There will be uncomfortable situations or inconveniences but the best part about those are how much you grow and learn from them. How you learn to react and respond to the problems that come your way, strengthen you as a person and it is so beneficial.
Some photos:

(Amagerstrand: a beach where we often swam)

(A beach in Falsterbo, Sweden with my friends Dara and Monica)
(The main tourist area: Nyhavn)