Exchange Report

During my spring 2016 semester, I left on the 30th of January to study abroad in The Hague (Den Haag), the Netherlands for 5 months. I went home on the 26th of June because my rent with the Student Hotel was due to end on the 25th of June. I had just gotten back from my co-op internship in Hong Kong and had about a week to pack, say my good-byes and mentally prepare myself for exchange in Europe, a side of the world that I had never been before. As a Communication major at SFU, I went on exchange to study at The Hague University's Academy of European Studies and Communication Management, which was a mixture of both European Studies courses such as European Law and Politics, and also International Communication Management courses such as Branding and Marketing Planning. At HHS, exchange students are not only able to take courses within their faculty that they applied for, but also other courses outside. For example, I was able to take an International Business course such as Marketing Planning & Strategic Management as well. An important thing to know with HHS final exams are that there are “resits” in which you can have a second chance at passing a course that you previously failed. Most resits are in end of June right after you get your marks. However, some courses have resits in late August, which means that you must be physically present still to take the exam, so it may be better to buy a one-way flight for this matter just in case. HHS is not one of those universities that allow you to take an exam proctored back at SFU. Another option is to buy a round trip ticket coming back end of August and changing the flight if you've successfully passed all your courses. (This might be the cheaper option since round trip tickets are usually cheaper).

Before leaving for exchange and choosing things like living accommodations, I was lucky enough to have gotten in contact with another SFU student who went for exchange in The Hague in the fall of 2015. She gave me very useful advice as to how to get there, what courses to take and most importantly, where to stay. I ended up choosing to stay with The Student Hotel over DUWO because of its facilities and overall environment. Although it was a bit pricier than DUWO and Waldorpstraat for example, I don’t regret my choice at all. The Student Hotel is equipped with amazing student common areas, a piano, a gym and even an outdoor courtyard to hang out in. Throughout my exchange, I brought enough euros to pretty much last my entire exchange so I didn't apply for a Dutch card. I also brought my
Visa credit card with a chip which I was able to use at most places EXCEPT the main grocery store: Albert Heijn which only accepted Dutch cards and cash, which is important to bear in mind. Jumbo, another main grocery store that is situated farther from The Student Hotel and closer to the university, however, was able to take my Visa credit card.

Upon arriving, I was easily able to find The Student Hotel, as it was a 3 min walk from Den Haag Hollandspoor train station, the station closest to the university. My housing cost about 700 euros/month and lasted 5 months. For those who want to stay longer in Europe even after school is over, I would recommend staying with DUWO as their rental contract period is about a month longer than the one at The Student Hotel (till end of July).

After arriving on Saturday January 30th, I got to get to know my kitchen/corridor mates a bit more and a week long of orientation period commenced on the 2nd of February till the end of the week. There, I got to meet more exchange students in my faculty and also instructions on how and where to pick up my Residence Permit, in which The Hague University applies for on my behalf. The orientation is very straightforward in terms of financial matters, since you have already paid for everything prior to your arrival in the Netherlands.

I would also highly recommend buying a bicycle for your exchange term at the very beginning! The Student Hotel rent comes with your very own bike for your entire stay and I had grown extremely attached to it. If you stay with DUWO, you will have to buy your own bike but I have friends who have bought bikes as cheap as for 60 euros! Before leaving, you will have to sell it otherwise. The first week of orientation was on February 2nd to the 5th and there was something interesting to do every day, including getting to know the school, events and new friends. School started for me the week right after (the very next Monday) and classes are relatively short – most are an hour and a half – and I would have the rest of the day off pretty much. Bear in mind there was quite a big difference in my weekly schedule just because at Simon Fraser, the lectures are usually longer (2 hours) with mandatory tutorials whereas at HHS, there were no tutorials. As an exchange student studying European Studies & CMNS Management, there is a mandatory course you must take called Introduction to Dutch Culture and Society. This class is once a week on Thursdays and it allows you to learn more about Dutch culture – from its cuisine, water management, art and architecture. Also keep in mind that with this course, it is highly important to attend the necessary amount of fieldtrips needed to pass. I enjoyed a day trip to Gouda to learn to bake stroopwaffels, eat Gouda cheese and take a tour around the
historic sites of the old town. I also really enjoyed my fieldtrip with my Europe @home group to the Peace Palace.

Living in The Hague is really nice because it is considered a “big city” in the Netherlands, but to me it was still somewhat small compared to Vancouver. As a royal city, The Hague holds the seat of the Dutch parliaments and the Peace Palace, which is something that you must go see if you are planning a study abroad in The Hague. Amsterdam is a 50 min to an hour train ride away and Rotterdam is 20 minutes away by train. Make sure you get an OV chip card for the duration of your stay. (You simply load up the card with money by cash or credit card and you can use it just like you would use a compass card in Vancouver – except there is no door/gate but they do check regularly and I’ve heard the fine being over 200 euros) Living in The Hague also has other perks. One of the nicer, larger beaches in South Holland called Scheveningen Beach is also located in The Hague. Although you can take a tram there for around 3-4 euros, I usually just bike there in about 20-25 minutes. I would highly recommend to take advantage of your bike (if you do end up getting one), and explore Holland with it. One of my most cherished moments of exchange in the Netherlands is probably how much I took advantage of my Student Hotel bike and biked to places like Rotterdam, Leiden and Wassenaar. Through biking, I discovered even more little towns and villages in Holland that I would have otherwise never gotten to see. Overall, it was an epic exchange that I would absolutely do over again if I could!