

Introduction

After careful consideration I chose The University of Oslo (UiO) in Norway as my number one destination for my study abroad exchange. I headed out to Norway for the Fall 2013 semester, which was expected to start August 19th until the end of November. However, the exam schedule typically runs until December 20. I continued with my psychology degree at the Psychology Faculty at UiO. Norway is a wonderful country, full of friendly people and an interesting culture. The Fall semester is ideal for weather because of the mild nature, however, the winters can be quite cold with lots of snow. Norway is the place to experience the Scandinavian culture, northern lights, and Christmas festivities.

Before You Leave

Preparation for Exchange

It takes a lot of time and work to prepare for exchange, therefore I suggest using the study abroad advisors as much as possible. They are a great source of information and will efficiently answer any questions. Make sure you attend all of the information sessions beforehand so you are mentally prepared to settle into a new country. It is important to submit a residence permit application as soon as possible and find out any Visa requirements. You are in fact allowed to work part-time in Norway if you have a residence permit, which may be helpful for some people. When planning a budget for Norway you must expect to spend more than average. Prices of everything are almost double in some cases, such as clothes, food and alcohol.

What to Bring

Depending on the semester you are travelling to Norway determines the amount of clothing necessary. During August and September the weather is beautiful, very much like our fall. However, once winter sets in around November the temperature drops so it is crucial you bring a warm jacket and lots of layers. A pair of waterproof boots is recommended. Other things to consider when packing for Norway are long underwear, bedding, sheets, towels, single laundry packs for easy hand washing, feminine hygiene products (ridiculously expensive in Oslo) and shower products. Including these things in your packing list will reduce costs when you arrive to Oslo.

Once You Arrive

Travel and Transportation in Oslo

Transportation in Oslo is fantastic! The cost of a one month unlimited transit pass is equivalent to $70.00 Cdn. There are three ways of getting around Oslo: the T-Bane (underground/skytrain), Trams and Busses. You can get anywhere in and
around Oslo through these routes of transportation, so I highly recommend purchasing a monthly pass. The T-Bane and busses also bypass most of the student housing, which is very convenient especially in the colder months when walking becomes more painful.

Throughout your exchange you probably want to do some more travelling so it is important to know about the cheap airlines and different airports. There are two airlines going out of Oslo that I have had experience with. I would highly recommend Norwegian Air over Ryan Air because of the great service and convenient times and destinations they offer. Ryan Air was cheap, but only if you are willing to travel with a small bag and are ready for a lot of extra travelling. Oslo has three airports: Gardermoen, Rygge, and Torp. The main hub is Gardermoen, which is located just outside of Oslo. There is a Flytoget that leaves every 10 minutes from the airport and directly into Jernbanetorget (central station) in about 20 minutes for about 85 NOK. From central station you can commute via T-Bane or Bus to your student housing. Rygge is a very small airport about 45 minutes – 1-hour bus ride from Oslo. For convenience, I would avoid Torp because it is nearly 2 hours away. When travelling to Sweden and around Norway I would suggest taking a bus or train. If you are interested in travelling to Denmark I recommend the DFDS Cruise line that goes directly there. However, it is best to go early in the term due to stormy weather.

Financial Details

The currency used in Norway is the Norwegian Krone (NOK). Approximately 6 NOK is equivalent to 1 Canadian dollar. Therefore, the price of everything is much higher and there is a lot of conversion involved. Try not to focus too much on it, just be aware that 100NOK is around 20 dollars. Norway is a card based society. You can use your Visa basically everywhere except the little family run stores in Grønland. It is always a good idea to carry a little bit of cash in cases of an emergency, but usually you will be fine. Everything will be more expensive compared to Vancouver, but from experience, you do get used to it.

During Exchange

Arrival and Orientation

UiO did have the option for a student volunteer to pick up exchange students; I heard this was a great experience by some friends. However, we arrived on a Sunday and that option was not available to us. We took a taxi from the airport because of the amount of luggage. It was more convenient and worth the extra money. However, as discussed before there are cheaper options, such as the Flytoget. When arriving at the University on August 12th we were welcomed to our Buddy Groups. The buddy groups are a great place to meet amazing and interesting people who are all on exchange and feel as lost as you are. The Buddy leaders were great at including everyone in Oslo activities, such as scavenger hunts, pub nights,
and trivia nights. I met many of my closest friends through these buddy groups. Definitely try to get involved!

Accomodation and Living

I lived at Kringsja student housing, which is directly off Line 6 T-Bane and really close to the amazing lake called Sognsvann. A lot of international students from the colleges and universities from all around Oslo live in this area!! I shared a bathroom with one other person and a kitchen with 6 others. It is important to get to know your roommate and others on your floor to ensure that all of the daily chores are not left up to one person. The rooms are very spacious for a dorm room. The rooms are equipped with a desk, lamp, two chairs and a bed, which is more than enough for a furnished room. If you decide to personalize the room I recommend going to IKEA (bus directly there from central station) during the first couple of days. There are no sheets or bedding provided so I would bring an emergency sheet and blanket for the first night. Due to jet lag you may not feel like going to IKEA the first day you arrive. The shared kitchen is equipped with any utensils from previous tenants and usually has some dishware. Walking distance away from Kringsja is another student housing called Sogn where more international students live.
Culture, Places to Visit, and Social activities

Norwegians are known to be shy and distant when it comes to meeting new people. However, once you break the ice with them they are quite friendly and very helpful if you are lost or need help. Oslo is full of convenience stores (Narvesan, 711, Deli De Luca) with amazing choices of food and drink. Also, Norwegians love hot dogs, pizza, and shrimp sandwiches and now so do I. Even though Oslo is beautiful and has the most amazing sunsets at Aker Brygge, you still should explore the rest of this wonderful country.

During the summer months (August – September) I recommend heading to Preikestolen and/or Trolltunga by either bus, train or rental car. Here you can witness the most amazing views of the famous Norwegian Fjords. Unfortunately I did not make it to northern Norway, but if you are dying to see the Northern Lights take a flight to Trømso where you can experience the true Norwegian winter. Another beautiful city is Bergen, where you can get a feel of a smaller town and true Norwegian lifestyle. From Oslo it is easy to travel to Stockholm and Copenhagen for a couple of days vacation.

Throughout my exchange I met so many different people and we would all support each other with making meals, hosting kitchen gatherings and introducing new friends. The nightlife in Oslo is pretty good but please be aware of the age restrictions of each venue.
Academic Details

The lecture format is similar to SFU, but the assignments in class are not counted towards your grade. For the three psychology courses I took I had three take home exams worth 100% of my grade. The grading was not the same as SFU, they use A, B, C, D, E before your grade becomes a fail. There are options to appeal a grade and to ask for explanation. However, the preparation for the finals could have been clearer. The schedules are pretty lenient and were not too intensive for the psychology program.

Reflection after Exchange

Throughout exchange I have learned a lot about what true independence means and how to get along with complete strangers. I have enhanced my ability to plan, manage, and travel independently. I managed to travel to 12 different cities and explored 7 different countries where English was not the first language. It is important to remember that it does take time to adjust to a new lifestyle; however, with the support of many other exchange students you will be happier and make lifelong friends.