Exchange Report

Introduction

Partner University: Lund University
Country: Sweden
Major: General Studies w/ Psychology Minor
Term: Spring 2012 (January 10 - June 03)

Preparation for exchange:

It feels like so much has happened this year it is hard to remember all of the details before I left for this exchange. However, the preparation stages can be quite stressful as there are a lot of unknowns that you won’t be able to anticipate. My best advice is to keep up to date on your deadlines and provide yourself with lots of time in case something comes up that you missed or made a mistake on. Some of the best advice given to me was to take some time before and after your exchange to travel! On my way to Sweden I stopped in Iceland, and after Sweden I travelled around Europe and eventually Asia. I figured I might as well while I was there and had met so many great people (meaning Europe of course). This will be one of the most exciting times of your life, try not to overload yourself with work and take the time to meet people and travel with them as there will be many people in a similar circumstance to you. Arriving in Lund is quite simple actually, take the train from Copenhagen airport to Lund and there will be mentors wearing blue shirts right there to assist you the rest of the way. From there you will be taken to the AF Building, where you will get information on course registration, your housing keys (if on-campus housing was given), information on the orientation week (highly recommended), and the option to buy a blanket and pillow (bring your own sheets!). From there they will drive you and fellow exchange students to your provided housing so you can start to get to know everyone you live with. Don’t be shy, people here are very kind and welcoming so they always appreciate you coming to say hello.

At first, things can be a little stressful - buying a working bike, a bus pass (you need one to ride the bus), getting a phone, taking out money, getting your supplies for living, signing up for a nation, affirming course registration, all the while being distracted by the many, many people and parties in the first week. My best advice is try to get a second-hand (probably 25th hand) bike right away as the good ones go fast! You’ll need one to get around to the different areas and the city. Otherwise sign up for a nation so you can go to nations for dinner and parties right away. The school gives you a sim card so you can go and buy credit if you already have a phone, otherwise you will want to go to The Phone House to get one in the main square. Try not to stress too much at first like I did, things will unfold and work themselves out nicely it’s just a bit of overwhelming excitement being in a new city and looking to get comfortable. Sweden is big on credit cards, don’t be shy to use one anywhere, but ATM’s are in may places so cash is easily available. You need your student visa before you go so be sure to apply far in advance! Mine took about 3 weeks to process but times can vary. Once you get to Lund you will have to go to Malmo (nearby city) to pick up your residence permit card (your official Swedish ID). I would recommend asking your mentor to take your group there to get them as it can be a bit tricky to find.
During Exchange

As far as accommodation, I lived in Ostra Torn at first (Highly NOT recommended) which was very far out of the way and provided a lackluster social environment given there are no corridors or common rooms. I moved to Delphi shortly after, which is the largest student housing area in Lund with over 2,000 students living there. It was also not the closest place, but nonetheless a 10 minute bike into town. I had a great time there, always parties going on and lots of people around with a nice mix of Swedes and international students. Other housing areas I found great were Parentesen and Spoletorp. Spoletorp is all international students but has an awesome social environment and many good parties, it was always the meeting place for our group of friends due to it being so central. Parentesen is like a smaller, closer to town version of Delphi with an awesome courtyard in between the two buildings. If I had to choose, if you don’t mind a bit of noise on weekends (parties), I would go Parentesen!

Academically, it was very interesting to learn so much about a country while being in that country. I did special area studies courses which focused on Swedish related academia. The courses don’t offer a big workload - I managed to take 5 of them with very little study stress. For the first few weeks your advisor can take you in and out of these classes at will so you are free to change your mind as you go, given space is available. Swedish curriculum differs from Canada, you don’t take all of your courses all semester long. In fact, each semester is broken up into two smaller semesters, where most people have two classes in the first half, and two in the last. At any given time, you will likely have 1-3 classes going at once, even though you may be taking 5 courses in the semester. I found this system great as it allowed for a much better focus on any given subject!

Swedish people are some of the nicest people I’ve ever met, but they can be somewhat reserved. The only Swedes I really got close to were those that I lived with, but they were all great people. They really come out of their shell when they drink, so don’t be afraid to take them partying and let them show off their English. I figure if you are coming to Sweden you might as well try to get to know some Swedes - live in a place where you can.

Lund is the most social place I have ever been in this planet, solar system, or universe. There are social events such as parties, dinners, sittnings, cruises and many other events that you will hear about while you are there that happen all the time. Get involved with some of the nations - volunteer to bartend, cook, or help out for an event and they usually give you a free sittning! They have a good volunteer structure in Lund, you help out a nation (which is very fun), and they give back. A sittning is a traditional Swedish event where roughly 50-150 people get together for dinner, singing, dancing, and lots of drinking. I went to about 6 while I was there and they were some of the most fun nights I’ve ever had. You’ll hear about Sea Battle, a 2-day cruise from Stockholm - Estonia, DO IT!

Reflection After Exchange
What I feel I’ve gained most after completing my exchange is perspective. Living in such a progressive country, with such nice people and having the opportunity to travel the world at the same time have broadened my perspective. It has also made me realize that you can go live anywhere in the world by yourself and make amazing friends no matter how diverse of backgrounds they are from. At times it was challenging (such as grocery shopping without english labels), but that was part of the fun. Some people say they wish they knew certain things before they left, but I think if I knew everything going into it, it wouldn’t have been as exciting. So no, there is nothing I wish I knew before I left, just have an open ming and willingness to be spontaneous and try new things. Without a doubt making the decision to go on an exchange was one of the best decisions I have ever made. It’s an experience you will never forget, and absolutely never regret.

Pictures

Lomma beach!

Easter egg hunt, football and dinner!
The bike ride to Lomma Beach!
Ferry in Gothenburg.

Embracing the January snow.
Ice bar in Copenhagen!